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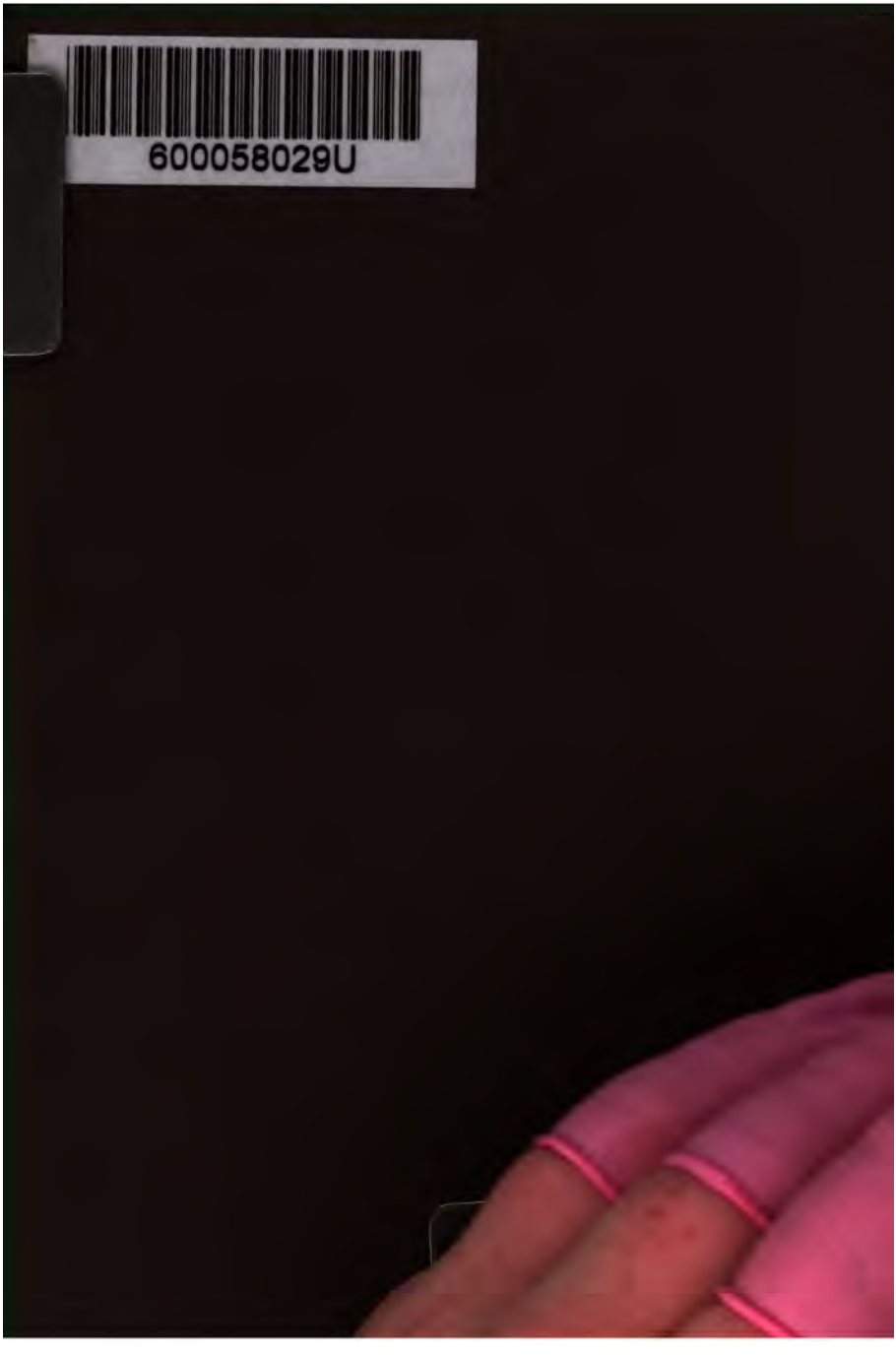
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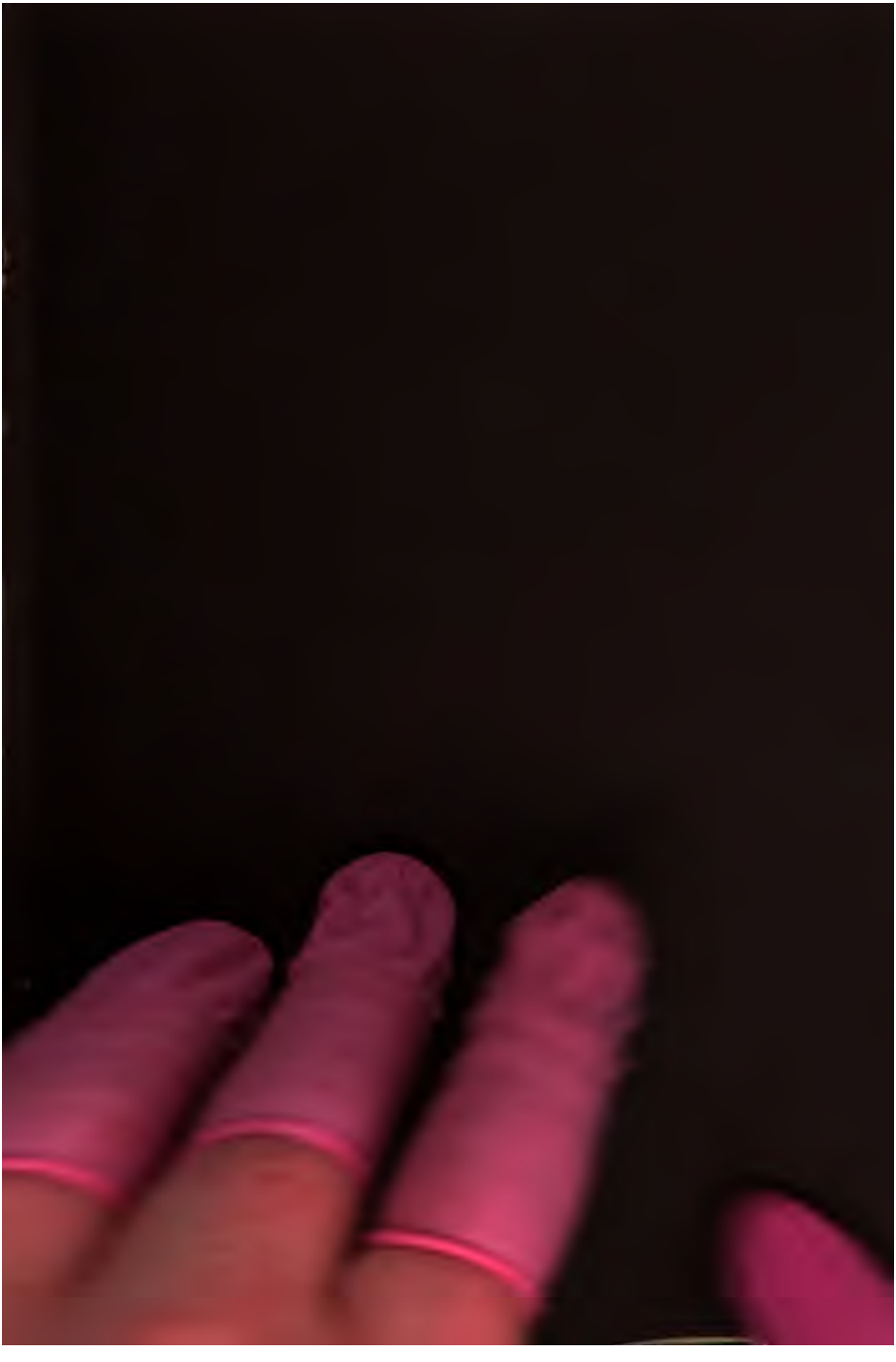
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BY FANNY LABLACHE,

AUTHOR OF "STARLIGHT STORIES.



BODLEIANA JAN '79

WITH FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. H. COLLINS.

GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,

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1879.

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LITTLE CHICKWEED.

LITTLE CHICKWEED.



REEN-MEAT O! for your singing birds; Green-meat!
Chickweed and Groundsel.
With early dew-drops on it, cool and sweet.
Groundsel and Chickweed!

A pennyworth will buy you many a song:
Chickweed and Groundsel.
And 't is quite sure to keep fresh all day long.
Groundsel and Chickweed!

SHE was singing this, as she came, at the close of what had been a very hot summer's day, home to her village from the nearest country town, seven miles distant, with her half-empty basket clasped in her weary arms. Chickweed, for that was the name she was best known by, lived in that place so vaguely and yet so widely known as "Thereabouts,"

and at a time to which no exact date need be given. Suffice it to say, that it was before railways were invented, or the powers of electricity discovered; at a time when there were places not only in Europe, but in England itself, which were not marked down on maps, and about which people living at a distance of some twenty or thirty miles knew very little, and the rest of the country nothing whatever.

But the exact name of place and time matter very little; for in all places and at all times little birds have loved chickweed and groundsel.

She had been singing her song in the hot dusty town yonder; but people had felt too languid to pull their pennies out of their pockets. The very birds themselves had sat swollen and silent on their perches, very likely thinking to themselves how pleasant it would be if they could only slip out of their feathers in such weather as this, and muttering to themselves as they heard the well-known cry—

"Green-meat, O! for your singing birds!"

"Singing birds, indeed!—stewing birds more likely! Now I shall just be curious to see if that lazy young friend of mine who is sprawling on yonder sofa, with her hair pushed from her forehead and tucked behind her ears, and who has left one dear little bronze slipper in the very middle of the room, will exert herself to run downstairs and get me a little bit of fresh salad—it is the only

thing I could possibly put in my beak this day. No! she doesn't move; I'll give her a gentle hint then. I'll say 'salad' as loud as I can."

The young girl's eyes were closed. The flies hummed drowsily in the window. The street was quiet save for little Chickweed's cry of "Green-meat, O!" All was still, faint, and close.

The little bird ruffled himself up in a lump, and uttered a sudden and shrill "Tweat!"

His young mistress opened one eye: "If you are going to make a noise, Master Dick, I'll throw the little table-cover over your cage."

"Sorry I spoke," muttered he, in a series of hurried tweats; for the little table-cover was no joke.

The bird was compelled that day to dine without salad, and little Chickweed went homewards that evening with very few pence in her pocket, which was a sore disappointment of course, but which, nevertheless, did not prevent her singing out loud for very content at the sight of her dear village, what she had sung for mere business in the narrow streets of the town.

And when the birds in the hedges heard her voice they rushed out from between the leaves in twos and threes, and down the village, chattering "Cheep, cheep" as loud as they could, which perhaps meant "Little Chickweed is coming!" and perhaps did not.

For there is, unfortunately, no way of finding out the exact truth of these things.

Anyhow, when Chickweed reached the spring, there were plenty of laughing, jumping, chattering children to meet her and to welcome her.

The spring was only a great gap, hollowed in the bank, round which the lovely blue forget-me-nots grew, and in which the fresh clear water collected itself, with an incessant air-bubble or two in the middle of it, as though a great fish were lying at the bottom pouting to himself.

Three sides of the gap were formed by the bank itself. The fourth was made artificially by a few great stones held together with mortar, over which the abundant water had trickled for so many years, that it had hollowed a little cutting for itself down which it dribbled into the road, and having long ago chosen the lowest places to meander over, had meandered rivulet-wise close under the bank until it reached another hollow, where it had finally stopped to collect itself into a most delectable pond for ducks and geese.

"What luck to-day, little girl?" cried an old man, as he paused in his evening walk to pat the heads of one or two of the children.

Little Chickweed looked up from the wet stones against which she was pressing her little hands, hot and dry from the rub of the basket-handles, letting the pleasant cool water trickle between her fingers,

while one or two babies gazed at her with solemn grimy faces.

"Very good—in some ways, master!" cried she, getting up at once when she saw who it was, and shaking the wet from her hands.

"I have a present for you!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the old man, taking his pipe from his mouth in order to look astonished.

"I have really, and you must guess what it is."

"I can't think."

"Do try!"

"Well, a small cake?"

"Better than that!"

"Let me see, an egg perhaps or two? No? Then what can it be?"

"Nothing to eat, something that you want very very much" said Chickweed.

"Can it be,—but, indeed, I earnestly hope you have not been so extravagant, dear little girl; but, do you mean to tell me it is a pair of shoe-laces?"

"Better!" cried Chickweed, smiling.

"Better! How can anything be better than the thing one stands in need of?"

"What else, besides shoe-laces, do you stand in need of?"

"Nothing," said the old man, after a little pause. It was easier to say that than to name one need in a hundred.

"It's a book" said Chickweed, taking it hurriedly from underneath the half-dead chickweed and groundsel.

He almost snatched it from her, with a look of wonderment that was payment enough to Chickweed.

"Look, children! They are almost dead the poor little tired bunches!" whereupon she strove to freshen them by holding them in the running water for a while; but, if they revived at all, and knew how disinterested was her care of them, since by no means could they be kept fresh enough for to-morrow's sale, they gave no sign. They had been gathered in vain; and who can say that they were not fading away the quicker for the thought?

"Let us dig a little nice hole and cover them up warm," said one little voice.

But Chickweed would not hear of this, and laid them in the shade, bunch by bunch, in a row, just where the fresh living forget-me-nots were peeping at themselves in the water.

"I always gather too much," said Chickweed, regretfully.

"Where did you get this?" said the old man, looking up for one instant, and then burying his face in the book again.

"There is an old woman in the market-place," explained Chickweed, "who sells old clothes and books, and old shoes and boots. She has a bird in

a cage; and I very often give him a bit of groundsel. Well, to-day she called me to her stall, and bade me choose a book! I was so surprised; I could do nothing but stare at her. They told me she was very rich, but I could not believe it. But now, of course, I know she must be rich, because a book is a large price for a spray or two of wild groundsel. But still I could not choose a book; but when I told her what kind of a book I wanted, one to suit a learned man—our Schoolmaster, in fact—she chose one herself; and—is it what you like?"

"Eh?" said he, looking up for a moment; and only answered her question by walking away, with his nose between the open leaves, and forgetting to thank Chickweed for her kind thought and welcome present.

There was a shout of laughter.

"Let him alone, children!" cried Chickweed.

But other people did not let him alone. Two or three of the village women, when they had seen the book, told him frankly that he should return it to Chickweed—that it would fetch, in the town, at least as much as a couple of baskets full of groundsel—and that the child was not in a position to make such a valuable present, and that he ought to be ashamed of himself for accepting it.

Nothing could have exceeded his distress. He waited till his visitors had left him, and then, with the precious book under his arm, went as quickly

as he could to Chickweed's wooden hut, which was so low-roofed as to be scarcely high enough for him to stand upright in, and laid it carefully down on her one chair (for table there was none).

"My dear," said he, agitatedly, "I never thanked you for lending me your book; but I do so now, with all my heart, dear Chickweed! Yours was a kind thought. See, there it is, my dear, with never so much as a stain or mark the size of a pin's head upon it."

"Have you done with it already?" said Chickweed, a little disappointed, for it was a large volume.

"Done with it!" cried he. "No! There is no end to that book, dear child. My brain does not reach so far. I read it and enjoyed it, and then, luckily, I forgot, and could read again! I cannot imagine what enjoyment people with good memories can possibly get out of books. Reading, to them, must be like eating a peach—pleasant while it lasts, but so soon over; and no second peach has the same flavour. Now reading, to me, my dear, is like sniffing at a posy—do you follow my meaning? You sniff, and sniff, and sniff, and then you think there isn't an atom of sniff left in your nose; and round the garden you go, fancying that you know all about that bunch of flowers; and yet five minutes afterwards, when you come back to it, it's as fresh and sweet and marvellous as ever!"

"Then keep the posy till you can really sniff no longer, Master Pepyn."

"That may be soon enough, little Chickweed," said he, with a tender smile.

"I only meant until you had done with it."

"Well—well—well," said Master Pepyn, turning over a few leaves with respectful fingers. "But I ought to give you something in return for it."

"Yes, perhaps," said she, frankly.

"But what?" enquired Master Pepyn.

"Ah! what?" repeated Chickweed.

The old man had but few things that he could give away. Chickweed thought of a certain set of three common crockery bowls that were his, and which were, in her estimation, precious objects indeed. The least of them, she felt, being far too great a price to ask for a mere old book.

But Master Pepyn's thoughts went beyond such household goods.

"I have an old butterfly-net. My boyish days of butterfly-hunting are over; nor have I much time, or the necessary books, for the study of entomology; but I might teach you the rudiments, perhaps. It is a fascinating study." By this time he had forgotten that he was only talking to an ignorant little country girl. Nor did he remember it, until she smiled.

"But I'm afraid you will not care for the net," he

continued, with so distressed a face that Chickweed made haste to answer.

"Yes, indeed, I shall."

"The only thing is, it may be too heavy for you to use with comfort, my dear. The handle was, I believe, a broomstick; the net hoop was a little iron hoop from a small cask. But the gauze—the gauze is real gauze, and very light, certainly."

Chickweed did not say how useless would be the lightest and best made of butterfly-nets in the whole world to her, since she had no wish to catch butterflies; but she thanked him, and said it would be very useful, no doubt. And when, two or three days afterwards, the old Schoolmaster fetched it from his garret and took it to her wooden shed, an unwieldy thing that was too heavy in the handle to catch butterflies, and too flimsy in the bag to catch fish, she did not do as some of the village girls advised her to do — make firewood of it before his very eyes—but set it cheerfully in a corner, saying—

"Who knows! it may be useful some day!"

And months afterwards so indeed it was. But to reach that time, the long hard winter that followed that hot summer had to be passed. And the passing of it was no easy matter. It was a time of great privation to all, and to none more than to Chickweed. One hears quickly enough of the comparative few that starve to death on land and at

sea—of those who have no bread but the chance bread of charity—but not so much of the many suffering millions who have food enough to live on, and to grow thin and weak upon.

Chickweed did indeed grow thin, and as pale as the snow that lay for so many weary months, so thickly over the ground. For there was, of course, now, no "green-meat" to gather, or if there had been, could she have walked nearly eight miles to town and back again in that cruel cold. She was handy, however, at most things, and was eager to learn and very tractable—so of all the village girls she was best liked by the country wives about, to help with their babies, or their washing, mending, or baking.

In this way, during the winter, she earned a very little money, and a great many small presents. A little flour, or a little bag of potatoes, or a loaf from the batch here, and a slice of salted butter and a piece of cheese there, and everywhere goodwill in plenty, and trifles of bacon rind and dripping. But it was poor living where there were six mouths to fill!

Here is Chickweed's family—

Her grandmother, too old and feeble to do anything but sit in the sun on summer days, and in the warmest corner of the hut on all other days; two little twin brothers, three years of age, with their little red mouths always wide open and waiting for food

to be popped in—always troublesome, always dearly loved.

Besides Chickweed's own hungry young self, there was a hen that, having done her very best in the way of eggs, came and went as she pleased, and ate any scraps she could get, and was very welcome to them for old friendship's sake—and a cat, thin and sour-tempered, which was too lazy to leave the old grandmother's knees to catch herself a plump mouse for breakfast or supper, but preferred sharing all her frugal meals, and felt no qualms of conscience whatever.

Before the spring came, however, all these well-loved things were gone from Chickweed's hut, and she was quite alone.

The snow had lasted so long, and had become so hard, that for all the good that the earth was to people, or people to the earth, they might just as well have been living on frozen water.

One comfort there was—that the seed lay snug and warm beneath it all, and quite out of harm's way, as it were; but above it, the men stood with pinched faces, and idle arms and hands, and wondered "how long this was going to last," and what would become of them if it did!

It was hard enough for those who were forced to live that winter on their hoarded savings and their garnered stores, but it was far harder for those who

had no savings or stores at all to fall back upon! and of these last was little Chickweed.

It was not, then, to be wondered at that by the time the frost broke, and the ground cleared, and the air was soft again, that the poor little girl found herself without one farthing in her pocket to buy food with. And what was far worse, with no strength left to work for either food or money—and that after a valiant and a piteous struggle, she fell like a little white daisy with its stem suddenly snapped in two.

While she lay, helpless and unconscious, arrangements were made for her and hers, which, by-and-by, well nigh broke her heart and theirs.

The grandmother was sent to an almshouse some miles distant, where she was well fed, well warmed, and well cared for, but where she nevermore might have her cat upon her knees—where she nevermore might see Chickweed and the little ones dimly through her fading eyes—where the smell was of fresh clean tiles and well-scrubbed floors, and had no sweet familiar whiff of smoke, and mouldy wood about it—where the chair she sat in had cushions perhaps, and was not for that uncomfortable to her old bones, but lacked, alas! the little notch of wood upon the arm, that her old restless fingers had played with for so many years.

The little boys, too, were sent to another home for the helpless—where their little limbs were cased

in green and grey—where at three years of age they were set to amuse the still younger babies. They did not grieve for very long. At first, loud clamourings, and afterwards a little stifled whimpering, whenever the thought of Chickweed struck them, and that was all.

As for the cat, it would not be removed from the old woman's empty chair; its heart was broken; it had been ill-tempered and selfish; but faithful as Faith itself. As for the hen, it would not be removed either, but it did not seem inclined to simplify matters by dying. It perched upon its wonted beam of wood in the roof, and clucked solemnly.

"Oh, well! Let her be!" said they who had been a full hour endeavouring to catch her—which was a wise say!

By-and-by, when it was quite spring, and that was in about six weeks, Chickweed awoke, as if from a long sleep, refreshed and rested, but very desolate and weak, and grieved indeed to think how much her illness must have cost her friends in such a time of dearth as that had been.

"I mean to work as hard as a thousand men!" cried she, as she thanked them with her kisses and her tears.

"Yes, yes, of course you do!" said they, "only don't go into the damp fields just yet. There are plenty of brats, goodness knows! let some of them go."

Very shortly after Chickweed was quite well again, there was a considerable stir in her village. The owner of the village itself, the lord of their lands and of their houses, had arrived. He had come to take possession of a property that had lately been left to him, and which consisted of an extensive oak and chestnut forest, the first trees of which lay about a mile or so south of the village; and of four or five miles of fishing-right in the little rapid river that tumbled in and out of the valley, and almost encircled the village. He was rich—rich enough, indeed, to have given away a great deal of what he made the people pay very dearly for, and he was not liked. Still, there was money to be made out of this wood, not only by himself, but by themselves, and in many different ways, especially by the different "leasings," as they were called, which he granted to the country people of the neighbourhood.

Some of these were important, and held by comparatively rich men. These were the harvests of brushwood, and the loppings of trees. The crops of chestnuts, and all nuts down to the humble acorns that fell from the trees, for pigs and poultry, or the dead leaves for enriching the soil where no trees were.

The rabbits, too, that burrowed under the brushwood, and the moles—and the wild cats and squirrels over head, for the sake of their skins. The fishing of the river, which was full of trout, and of

one or two ponds. The tall rushes that grew in them—nothing was lost—and everything was paid for; very much or very little according to the value of the "leasing."

Now since this grasping master had come among them, it was told that several "leasings," as they were called, were to be disposed of to the highest bidder, and on the day that had been fixed upon for that purpose, Chickweed found herself with the rest, making her way through the wood to where the owner of it lived for the present.

Business was very nearly over for the day, when she, who from weakness was among the loiterers, had come to the end of her walk, but it was not too late for her to proffer her humble request; and so, when the shouting and arguing and chaffering were done, she presented herself and made known her wishes—

"Might she as usual take the groundsel and chickweed, and the violets, and other wild flowers?"

She asked merely for form's sake, and because she felt it was respectful to do so, but never doubted that the answer would be "Of course you may!"

The man she addressed, who was busy making entries in a large iron-clasped book, looked up at her, ran his finger down the page, thought a minute, and then said bluntly—"No!"

Chickweed stood aghast—thought that she had been misunderstood, and began to explain.

"No, girl, no! Don't you know that the forest will now be strictly preserved and guarded, and that no one will be permitted to enter it without he or she is able to pay for a leasing of some sort? Don't stand in people's way." And he turned to someone else.

Chickweed grew scarlet, and the tears rushed to her eyes. This seemed, indeed, the last ill-natured



little flick from ill fortune's whip that she would have courage to bear.

She had been accustomed to play in that pleasant wood since she was a baby. The groundsel and the chickweed, of course—even the wild flowers—she could find elsewhere. But there was not another such wood to be found anywhere! Neither would the old days come back again, when she strung daisies together in chains with a long pin,

and split a dozen stalks right down, to every one that she only split half way!

She turned away with a little nod that meant—"Very well, and good morning," both, but she did not get far, only as far as the nearest piece of wall, against which she leant, pressing her face close to it, and crying silently.

Presently a soft voice whispered—"Why is oo cryin'?" and a pair of hands with plenty of energy, but little strength, pulled at her elbow.

"Let me look at oo face—eh?—eh?"

But Chickweed made no comprehensible answer.

The questions were repeated of course many times, children not being easily baffled by silence, but, just as she was coming to an end of her sobs and beginning to think that so sweet a questioner deserved some notice, the little hands loosed their hold, and when she had wiped the tears from her eyes, and could see around her, saying shamefacedly, "I've been very foolish!" the child was gone!

Then she began to think of her long walk home, not a little ashamed of her outburst, but longing to be away on the road homewards, and at liberty to cry again.

"Girl!"

Chickweed started, and looked around; and naturally every girl there did the same.

"Here, girl!—crying girl I mean!"

There was a general laugh at this. Of course there could be no two opinions as to the particular girl that was meant! Every girl present except Chickweed was grinning from ear to ear.

So Chickweed went forward again.

"Girl!" said somebody, evidently of authority, who was standing behind the writer in the iron-clasped book, "My son desires me to let you into the wood. Very good; You may go in as usual!"

"But master! master!" cried a young woman, pushing her way anxiously to the front of the little crowd, "She's a flower girl too, she is! She'll be picking the flowers too, she will! And I'm to have the flowers and mushrooms. It's all in the paper, and if she takes, she must pay!"

"I'll take nothing! I will interfere with nobody. I promise I won't!" cried Chickweed, earnestly. "Oh do let me go into the forest, I know every tree there!"

"Very good. But, girl, if you pick so much as a blade of grass, woe betide you. Now vanish.

"Please—please—may I have a paper then? They will not let me in perhaps without one. I will harm no one's property, indeed I will not."

"Give her a paper," said the Master to the writer at the table.

But here two or three angry voices were raised

in loud protest. Was she to have a paper for nothing?—going in and out and pottering about on other people's places, and poking her silly nose where it had no business to be poked. Was it because she could shed a convenient tear or two that she was to have for nothing what they had paid hard money for? Of course, if there were to be favourites, and that sort of thing, the sooner they were all off their bargains, the better for all parties, etc., etc.

The Master hesitated—

"Don't cry, darlin'," said a small voice, the owner of which leant so suddenly across the table on which lay the iron-clasped book, that he upset the great pot of ink and pen tray, but cared very little for the disaster so that he succeeded in grasping Chickweed's blue linen skirts.

"Wipe oo eyes. Don't 'poil oo pitty face."

There was a general laugh again, but the Master looked down on the little speaker and pretended to frown.

"Give me a pen," said he, testily. "'Tis the last time I'll have you with me on business days, Master Susceptible."

He stooped over the table, and for a minute or so his pen flew over the paper with a scratching sound.

Presently he looked up from the paper with a smile of amusement and straightened his back.

"Listen to me, bumpkins all!" cried he, "and let there be silence! This is the agreement entered into between myself, master of the oak plantation known as Derry Down Wood, and——and this girl here. Girl, what is your name?"

"Chickweed, sir, they call me."

"Bah! what is your name—sharp, now?"

"Joyce Halling," said a third voice in the crowd, the owner of which had pity on Chickweed's bewilderment.

"Is it?"

"Yes, sir!"

—"and the girl Joyce Halling, commonly known as Chickweed:

"Permission for the said girl to take for her use to eat, sell, or squander all such eatable or uneatable things as may be found by her in the soil of Derry Down Forest, at a distance of not less than three inches from the surface, and as deep down as she pleases, excepting all burrowing animals, and excepting (if she should find any) all gold and silver ore, or other metal, or diamonds, rubies, or emeralds, or any other description or variety of precious stones, or agates, or any other kind of valuable stone, marble, or pebble. Or any coins or silver vessels or gold vessels, or any ornaments of any kind whatsoever, valuable or not, which do all belong to me. And also excepting all roots, edible or otherwise, that have their beginning in the

soil and their ending above the soil, for the space of ten years, and similarly to other leasings granted this day—from to-day, March the 22nd,——, until March the 22nd in the year——, to which I agree. And she consenting for the same space of time to furnish every six months, namely, on January the first and July the first, a piece of stout netting, two yards square—the twine to be furnished to her by my agent—of a proper quality for my pheasant cage at Loaming Farm.

"(Signed) The Master of Derry Down Forest, his name—GUY APPLETHWAIT. JOYCE HALLING."

When the Master had finished speaking, there was a third hearty shout of laughter. Chickweed would have her walks in her well-loved greenwood; but she might not gather so much as a single daisy in it, and she would be obliged to pay for the privilege with at least four evenings' steady netting once in every six months.

The Master had not made a bad bargain!

"Fine crops of worms you'll get, mistress!" said one.

"Or, may-be, new potatoes!" said another.

"Nonsense, potatoes grow inside and outside the earth, don't they?"

These were the ones who did not know Chickweed. Those who knew her, and loved her, whispered her to give it up first. "It was a shame, it was," they agreed warmly.

"Now is 'oo quite happy?" said her little friend.

Up to that moment Chickweed had almost doubted if the price to pay were not too high a one for the privilege of a mere walk now and then, but now she could not seem so ungrateful.

"Yes, dearie," said she, heartily; "of course I am—and thank you, kindly."

The paper, therefore, was duly witnessed and signed, not without some laughter on the part of people from distant villages, and a little murmuring from Chickweed's friends—and certainly not without a feeling of vexation on her part.

But, after all, netting was pleasant work, and there were many long winter nights during which she could easily make enough netting to cover the whole village if she chose.

So she carried home her papers in the bosom of her gown, and thought no more of how the Master had hoodwinked not only herself, but his own little boy, so successfully.

Some little while afterwards, she was coming homewards from the town, with her half-empty basket on her head, singing blithely—not because her heart was light—but in order to lighten it—

Green stuff O! For your singing birds. Green stuff!
Chickweed and Groundsel.
One pennyworth you 'll find is quite enough.
Groundsel and Chickweed!

God sent the birds on earth with throttle sweet:
Chickweed and Groundsel.
But first He planted food for them to eat.
Groundsel and Chickweed!

when presently, at a sharp turn in the road, she came upon a little cart, a little pony, and a man, all moving slowly up-hill before her.

"Good evening," said Chickweed. "You are going my way, I see. Will you let me rest my basket on the cart? It is very heavy."

"Up you go," said the man, kindly; and before she quite knew that her feet had left the ground, Chickweed found herself reposing, basket and all, on the back of the cart, with her tired legs swinging downwards over the edge.

First she smiled her thanks, and then spoke them—"But won't the little pony be tired?"

"Not with such as you. How much can you weigh now? Half-a-pound, think? or, may-be, three-quarters?"

Chickweed laughed, but stopped suddenly in the middle of her laugh to give a great jump and cry out—

"Oh! what's that?"

"Go back, will you," cried the man, with an uplifted arm.

It was something cold against her hand, the hand that she was pressing on the bottom of the cart to steady herself, that had startled her.

When she looked round, however, she saw that it was only a dog's nose, and that above it there were a pair of shining, wistful eyes looking straight in hers.

"Oh! what a nice little dog!" cried Chickweed, who dearly loved all animals.

But it was by no means a beauty, being of an uncertain dirty-grey colour, deepening in places to dirty brown; having a coat which was neither tidily smooth or frankly and boldly rough, but a little of both; having legs, moreover, that were not pairs, so variegated in tint were they; and boasting but the merest apology for a tail, which, nevertheless, it wagged enthusiastically.

The man of the cart, however, cut very short Chickweed's caresses.

"She had better leave the dog alone. He was no good, he wasn't."

"Did he bite?" asked Chickweed, fearfully.

The dog answered that question for himself, not with his tongue, certainly, but with his little white teeth that just then were toying so gently with Chickweed's fingers, and doing them no harm that either he or she wot of.

Was he ill? Not with such a cold nose, surely? Was he—but surely he was not a thief, with those lovely truthful eyes?

"No, he wasn't a thief," said the man; "but for all that, he was going to die, as sure as to-day was Monday, he was. He had been paid to put an end

to him. He was only a worry on this earth, he was. And he meant to earn his money."

That was the pith of his discourse, which rambled in and out, and back again to the starting point, like a brook in a valley.

"You are going to kill him!" cried Chickweed. "Oh! poor dear little thing. Why?"

He was mischievous, the man explained. He was n't, in the first place, a dog of this country—though he spoke English, mind you, well enough; that is, he understood what was said to him, and waggled his tail and barked, and all that, as an English dog might. Because, you see, his master was an Englishman, and will have taught him our ways, although the pair of them did live abroad in foreign parts, as it were. Well, home he came to England, a fortnight ago, or three weeks, may be. Ah! it will be a month or more, say five weeks, and died the very day he landed. Well, what was to be done with the dog? First one took him, then another; then somebody else; this one and that one. He was for ever changing masters, being pretty in his ways, but as rampagenous as a monkey.

Scratching up the potatoes, and scratching up the carrots—all one to him 't was, provided he could scratch up something.

Well, who 'll keep a dog like that? He couldn't fetch or carry; he couldn't seem to fancy rat-

hunting; he wasn't pretty enough for a lap-dog; he wasn't good at anything but scratching, and at that he's first rate.

But you see that folks who plant potatoes and carrots generally want them for cooking purposes, not for dogs to amuse themselves with; and it's not likely he'll change his ways now, being no puppy.

"I wish I 'd a few pennies to spare, I 'd buy him!" said Chickweed, tearfully.

The little dog put one trembling paw on her arm, and said as plainly as though he spoke the words—"Take me with you!"

"Ah! everybody wants to buy him at first," said the man smiling, "but when it comes to a good scratch up of all the roots they 've got in the garden, it's quite another thing!"

"But I have n't a garden!" said Chickweed, "I'm much too poor!"

"Neighbours have, have n't they? And if you're too poor to have a bit of garden, you're too poor to keep a beast that ruins other people's. Who is to pay the damages?"

"Good bye!" said Chickweed, pressing the little shaggy creature to her face and scrambled off the cart; and would most surely have fallen flat on her nose in the muddy road, had not the man caught her by the arm.

"There 's a foolish trick!" cried he, amazed.

"I can't help it," faltered Chickweed, "give me my basket. I can't help him, and I can't sit and look at him. Do it mercifully."

"You 're a goose," said the man, "jump up again and we'll trot a bit."

But Chickweed shook her head, and stood still while the cart went on; and the last thing she saw as the cart turned another corner, was a little inquisitive head stretched out to watch her to the last.

She reached home by moonlight—some hours afterwards only. And this is why. A mile or so from the village, she had met the good wife, who was mistress of a farm some little way back off the high road, and who had bidden her come back with her to the farm house to earn a few pence at house-cleaning. She did not leave the farm house until the moon was at its brightest, and that was about ten o'clock; and being so late, she made haste, and ran down the winding lane that led from the farm house to the road, as quickly as she could, and over the deep cart ruts as lightly as a daddylong-legs!

Presently, however, she came to a full stop, and listened earnestly with a fast beating heart.

It was a sound of splashing water that had stopped her.

"Somebody has fallen into the pit!" thought she, "and cannot get out." "Is anybody there?" she called aloud.

There was no answer.

Where she had stopped there was a gap in the right-hand hedge, that led into long disused brick-fields.

Dangerously close to the lane there was a pit that had once been dry and was now half filled with water, as flat and perpendicular at the sides as the wall of a well, and the water quite deep enough to close over the head of any but the tallest man who should happen to fall in.

She did not long hesitate; if it were any grown person help must be got at once, for the splashing was too feeble to belong to any grown person who was not far spent. Or it might be a child—but surely a child would scream and sink?—or, after all, most likely a great fierce rat.

She could not run to the edge of the pit for all her impatience, for the ground shelved slightly downwards towards it, and was so rough and stony that an incautious stumble might easily send her in too, head foremost, to join the splashing!

When she did reach the edge and looked over, all she could see was a black mass of water with a little white gleam here and there; but the moon only touched the sides of the pit, and did not reach far enough to light up the water itself.

And all she could hear was a low piteous whine, as from a suffering and exhausted creature.

"It's a dog!" exclaimed Chickweed. "Are you

a little dog, my poors?" she enquired, earnestly bending over.

There was an unmistakable answer. It took the form of an eager and a brighter toned whine, and a renewed splashing, which said as plainly as words could have done—

"Oh! yes, yes; for pity's sake take me out of here, I'm almost done!"

It was, of course, useless to think of stretching down an arm. There was nothing to be felt when Chickweed stretched herself full length on the ground and reached her arm downwards, but the clammy sides of the pit, and all she could see with the utmost straining of her eyes was a struggling something vainly beating against the sides.

What was to be done? A plank of wood would be of the greatest help; but where was she to find the plank of wood? She would not dare—no, not even for two drowning dogs, to run back to the farm she had just left, and rouse them with the intelligence that a dog had fallen into the pit. They were such matter-of-fact people, as would bid her go home to bed and not play the simpleton with them.

Nor could she for the same reason run and wake up anyone in the village. A likely thing, indeed, that any of her hard-worked friends should leave their snug beds to humour her sentimental fads. She knew the sort of answer she would get!

"Oh! let be, let be—he'll take no harm, he won't!"

Meanwhile she was thinking, the splashing went on monotonously, and a little life was slipping away for want of a quick idea and an energetic hand to stay it!

Suddenly the quick idea came, and the energy too, and both sent her flying homewards for the butterfly net!

True, the gauze was flimsy, and would go "crack" with a touch, but the pole was long and fairly strong, and the hoop was of iron.

Oh! if only, if only the creature had the wit to understand her. If only he would be quiet, and not kick wildly and uselessly! If only he would take a good firm grip, and hang on, tooth and nail, like a human being would, she might save him!

She doubted, as she ran, whether the dog would know what use to make of his rescue! which showed that though she loved dogs, she did not know them well. He was perfectly self-possessed, and knew as well as she did what she wanted him to do!

When she had run her three or four hundred yards home, and the same back to the pit with her net in her hand, she was, thanks to her sound lungs, only a little out of breath, and ready to do her best.

Full of advice too, which was involuntarily spoken aloud, and which, though not perhaps understood, as far as mere words meant, must have carried

comfort and courage to the little ears that heard them.

"Now, dearie! no hurry, and for goodness' sake, no struggling! Let me see—"

She dipped the pole very cautiously. Oh! what a long way down it seemed before something dragged it downwards, and made it twenty times heavier than before, and that was the water saturating the flimsy net.

Rapidly to herself she thought out her plan. A cautious dip *behind* the dog was the proper thing to do, if only she could be certain which was tail and which was head! For, of course, if she were to attempt to fish him up head foremost, his poor little head would certainly go straight through the gauze, and his whole body follow after! No, he must be carefully fished up tail first, in order to give him the chance of grasping the iron hoop with his front paws and his teeth too.

The question was—which was tail? Common sense, however, suddenly came to the rescue, and told Chickweed, in her own persuasive satisfactory manner, that the head would be sure to be nearest the side of the pit, for that a dog would not try to scramble up a wall tail foremost.

She hesitated no longer, but lowered her net again, and as she lowered it cautiously and slowly, it seemed to her as if the sound of splashing were growing, all of a sudden, fainter and fainter.

"Courage!" cried she earnestly; "I'm doing all I can! Where are you my poor? I do wish I could see you clearly. Come—come now! Courage then."

At the sound of her voice, the exhausted dog roused himself to further efforts. Gently and yet quickly she dipped her net behind the one moving spot that seemed to be of a different blackness to the darkness that was round it, and pulled firmly towards her.



As she thought, the dog's hind legs went through the gauze with the first struggle he gave. But if a drowning man catches at a straw, a drowning dog may catch at an iron hoop.

First, however, the hoop caught him under the forelegs across his panting chest, and when Chickweed felt the jerk and the increased weight, she instantly pulled towards her quickly and quietly, as far as the sides of the pit, and then upwards. The

dog knew well enough what to do! He gripped the iron ring with teeth that were like bits of wrought steel. And with all his feet, all his will, all his despairing dying strength, struggled to keep his hold. Fortunately, one little back paw struck against the lower side of the ring by accident.

That helped him, and it was well it did! for he was well nigh spent. He was wise enough to keep it where it struck, and to keep still—pressing with his hind paws on one side of the ring and holding on with his teeth to the other, and making a bar of his numb little body from side to side of the circle.

If Chickweed had been quickwitted in her pity—so had he—in his despair! The rest was easy. Hand-over-hand she pulled at her broom handle with a will.

Seven feet seems nothing of a distance, but she must need be quick and yet not too abrupt, lest her feeble strength give way, and not only dog, broom handle, iron hoop and all fall back with a splash into the water; but she, her own crouching fearful trembling self also!

It did not, perhaps, take longer than one real minute to rescue the dog—but any one who has passed sixty leaden-footed seconds in suspense, will know how long a minute really is—and then he was safe, and lay panting and exhausted on the ground before her.

"You must be rubbed well," cried she, delightedly, and threw herself on her knees to do it. "And you must be warmed, and fed. Why!—why, goodness, gracious me!" She knew the dog!

It was the dog that tore up other people's carrots and potatoes. In his limp, bedraggled state she had not known him; but when he feebly struggled to his feet, shook himself, stretched out his head to her hand and licked it, turning his lustrous eyes upon her with a look of deepest love and gratitude, why then—to be sure—she knew him in a moment.

Why, it must be quite five hours ago that the pony-cart must have passed the high road where this particular lane turns off. And the man, knowing of this deep water-pit, must have come back along the lane to throw the helpless little dog in it, making sure that no one would pass by that night to rescue him—without the scanty mercy of a heavy stone to end his sufferings at once.

The thought of how very cruel he had been chased from Chickweed's mind the dismay she could not help feeling when she saw that she had brought back to life the little creature that did such wilful damage wherever he went.

All she thought of was how to warm and comfort him. And so she lifted him in her arms, and ran back home with him, speaking kindly words of encouragement all the way in his limp little grey ears.

and wondering if he would be well enough by next week to begin his mischievous scratchings in the neighbourhood or not.

True charity, however, neither looks forward to future recompense nor to possible ingratitude. It knows but one time, and that the present moment. So, regardless of yet-to-be uprooted vegetables, Chickweed built a fire in her smoky grate, dragged her only warm covering from her bed, and wrapped her guest in it; heated water and soaked a crust of bread, into which she put a valuable piece of dripping, the size of a walnut; beat the whole into a smooth, warm pap, and gave it to him to eat.

He devoured it, and when he had finished and was licking his nose and lips, almost to his ears, she rubbed him with a piece of hot flannel so vigorously that presently he put up his little head and howled with the pain, imagining, most probably, that he was being punished.

It struck her then that possibly dogs did not require so much "bringing to" as do human beings, when they have been five hours struggling in deep water; and that after all, this dog would be quite ready to begin scratching about him the very next morning.

At that thought she laughed out so heartily that his feelings were hurt, and he laid one trembling paw on her arm, and looked at her with such a reproachful face, that she was quite enchanted.

"Why, my goody! what a little sensible darling you are!" cried she. "But now, as I'm very tired, let us go to bed; and we will see about the carrots the first thing to-morrow morning."

It certainly struck Chickweed every time she awoke in the night, which it was not her custom to do at all, that her wakefulness was caused by the weight of something, as it were, lying across her feet. But each time she lifted her head to look, a little grey head was lifted too, and gave a sigh of intense satisfaction. Chickweed might, for the moment, forget the dog's existence, but the dog did not forget Chickweed's from that night until the day when he remembered nothing more.

Her forebodings were right. It took her little friend, the next day, just a couple of hours to make acquaintance with not only his future home, but all the neighbours' homes, gardens and children. He was a plausible, sweet-tempered creature, and made new friends easily enough at the cost of a little joyous caper or two, a wag of his stumpy tail, a bright look up in their faces, and a cheery bark. And it was difficult for his new friends to be angry with him for being mischievous, when he showed them his depredations in their gardens with such innocent candour, and was himself so evidently pleased with the holes he made in their potato beds.

But Chickweed herself was not let off so easily;

and it was very soon made clear to her that if she allowed her little dog to wander about in other people's gardens she would have to pay for the damage he might do therein; and that if she could not afford to pay the damages, which was not unlikely, they must take the matter into their own hands and give the little intruder a breakfast of poisoned meat, which would settle the matter.

Hearing this, Chickweed tied him up in the hut all day while she was absent, and took him for dark and cheerless exercise at night, when she returned, with a long piece of string tied round his neck.

But this inactivity was not at all to his taste, and he howled so dismally and so persistently the whole of the time that Chickweed was away, that at last the neighbours complained of that too.

Then she took him into town with her every day, but he was a rover by nature. He adored Chickweed, and knew his way home to the little hut that was his home and hers. But it often happened that the streets through which she wished to pass, were not the streets through which he wished to pass, and then he would leave her with scant ceremony, and she might follow or not as she pleased. She was sure of finding him safe at home when she reached home herself, but what mischief he might have been about on the way was, indeed, more than she could tell or cared to think about! It was, indeed, vexatious, to say little, that this dog

should possess so infinite a charm of manner, and so loving a heart that his want of beauty was forgotten and his utter uselessness forgiven! For her reason told her that he was a trouble and a drawback to her, and her heart would not listen to her reason!

One day, when there was nothing for her to do in the way of work, she bethought herself of her strange "leasing" in the Oak Forest. And with her little "Worry" by her side, set out to take a walk with him therein.

"For there, at least," thought she, with a smile and a sigh, "the poor beastie may scratch his nose and paws to bits, and nobody will mind! There are no potatoes or carrots there! Only, perhaps, he will not care to scratch at nothing."

But they had not walked more than fifty yards into the forest, before Chickweed saw that he did care; and that he was, on the contrary, deeply interested!

He was wont to scratch up carrots and turnips much in a spirit of playful dalliance; but it was evident that now he meant business!

Ears and tail were erect and stiff. His nose almost pressed the ground, as he ran here—there—and back again, sniffing eagerly; and his little sudden snorts and growls told that something far beyond potatoes occupied his mind at the present time.

"Come, come, Worry, rats and mice or moles are not for us, come away!"

But for once he was deaf to her voice. And as after all, she had, she bethought herself, brought him there for the express purpose of scratching, she let him scratch; smiling to herself to think what a howl he would give if some burrowing beast or other should suddenly catch him by the nose! And she sat down with her knitting, and watched him.

He was now stationary, and was digging with all his might and main at a most promising little hole, his nose and paws literally buried in the ground, and his whole body in a perfect frenzy of delight.

"Poor little fellow!" said she, "how disappointed he will be when he finds nothing." And then she turned her head away to look at the pretty wild flowers she was not to gather.

By-and-by, when her knitting had fallen into her lap and her eyes were shut, and her thoughts had gone so far away that they were becoming quite confused and indistinct in the distance, she was roused by a little eager growl, and opened her eyes again with a start.

It was Worry. His nose and ears plastered with earth, brown top boots on his legs, and a look of such entreaty in his face that up she got at once.

"What was it, then, dearie? Not a potato, surely!"

He led the way to the scene of his labours, look-

ing here and there over his shoulders to see if she were coming.

It was a deep enough hole, but there was nothing in it; and there he stood doing his best to waggle off his little tail, and showing all his impatience in little eager whimpers and sudden snorts, and giving her to understand that if she could see nothing there, it was because she had no eyes.

Indeed, his manner was so confident, so earnest, so unlike his usual joyous careless self, that she felt that surely something there must be, and bent down and felt in the hole with her hands.

"Is that it?" said she, scooping away a little of the earth; "am I to dig too? Oh! why can't you speak, dear? What is it that you want?"

He whined and gave an impatient little spring, that said as plainly as possible—

"Why can't I speak? Am I not speaking? It is you do not understand!"

Whether he really did make himself understood by Chickweed, or whether by chance she happened to do what he wanted, she knew not herself; but she knelt down beside him and dug away the loose earth with both hands, laughing to herself and wondering what it could possibly be that agitated him so much, and far too curious, with all a young creature's fresh interest in things and reasons, to give up.

Presently she felt something hard against her

fingers and pulled it out. What was it? Nothing but a little black knot or root like a potato, about the size of a large plum, and full of bumps.

"Why it is only a nasty dirty bad potato after all!" cried she.

But Worry was anything but disappointed, and looked up in her face with such evident pride and satisfaction that she burst into a fit of laughter.

This, as laughter usually did, hurt his feelings, and he looked so crest-fallen that she must needs do something to comfort him. After all, she had taken him there that he might enjoy himself.

"Thank you dear," said she caressing him; "Such a nice speckled black potato, you dear foolish useless little thing! Now run about and find me some more," which he did faithfully and diligently as many as she had patience to dig up for him; for he would only do half the work, and seemed to consider that when he had found his game, and had dug a little way down towards it, that the rest of the work was to be done by her.

By-and-by she was tired—long before he was—and gathered the treasures together in her apron. And when they were thus put together they smelt so strangely, and were so different from anything she had ever seen, that she felt puzzled enough to take them home with her, and to make enquiries as to whether anybody had ever seen anything like them before.

The next morning, when she went into town with her bunches of "Green-Meat O!" she put her black roots at the bottom of the basket, just to see what manner of thing they might be out of mere curiosity.

Indeed, she asked the opinion of the very first person she met, and that was the miller. He sniffed them; that, indeed, was the first thing anybody was likely to do—they were so odorous—and then he said—

"Where did you get them?"

Chickweed explained.

"Ah!" and then he sniffed again—"Well, they're sure to be something or other, you know!"

"Yes." Chickweed felt sure of that. But the thing was, was it a something that was good for anything, or not? Good to eat for instance.

"Not—I should decidedly say *not*," answered the miller—"Leastways, I'm not going to take the first bite—and don't you! You'd better ask in town."

This advice was at least good, and to the point, if the information was not. Accordingly, Chickweed refrained from biting, and happening to sell some groundsel to one of her kindest friends—a woman who "knew things!" she produced one of the roots.

"Please, Mistress Anne, what is this?"

"I know!" said Mistress Anne, taking it promptly in her hand, and sniffing it—"It's a—

tut, tut,—I shall certainly forget my own name next; I saw some in London, once; it's a delicacy; they come from abroad. How did you get it, child?"

"But, Mistress Anne, they are English," cried Chickweed; "and I've got all these. May I tell you about it?"

As she was speaking, Mistress Anne, who was still saying, "Tut, tut, I shall forget my own name next," espied her husband, who had travelled much in his early days, coming whistling down the garden walk—"He will know," cried she. "Here, Gideon, Gideon, come and tell us what are these."

He took it at once in his hand, and at once proceeded to sniff it.

"Where did you get it?" said he, eyeing her suspiciously.

"I've all these."

"Where did you get them?" repeated he.

"In Derry Dowh Forest, Sir."

"Oh! come, come, now!"

"Sir, I did indeed."

"But they don't grow in England, child."

"These did," cried Chickweed.

"Oh! come, are you sure?"

"Why, look at her face!" cried Mistress Anne, warmly, "can't you see how bewildered she is?"

"My dog scratched them up," began Chickweed.

"Dog, eh?" cried he, "What dog?"

Chickweed and Master Gideon might have gone

on asking and answering rapid and disconnected questions for another hour, had not patient Mistress Anne laid her hand on Chickweed's shoulder.

"Quietly, dear child, tell Master Gideon all about it, of course, but quietly and clearly."

Thus checked, and yet encouraged, Chickweed told her tale, beginning from the very day of the leasings, not without some agitation, but no fear, because of Mistress Anne's gentle ways and Master Gideon's kindly eyes.

When she had finished—

"Heaven make you worthy of good luck, little girl," said he; "you've the law on your side, and though they may make some resistance, I doubt if they could prevail. Signed and witnessed, and you have the paper—and dated, too? Yes. That's good; that's first-rate!"

"Gideon," cried his wife, "will you or will you not tell me the name of the things?"

"They're called truffles," said he.

"And may I eat them like potatoes?" said Chickweed.

"Eat them," cried Master Gideon; "not unless you're more extravagant than I take you to be. But you must take care of your paper and your little dog."

What did it matter that Worry's coat was not beautiful—that his tail was stumpy and his legs not pairs? What did it even matter that he had the love of scratching-up so deeply implanted in his

breast, that scratch he must, whenever it pleased him, whether the time happened to be convenient or not; since he, of all dogs throughout many a broad country round, was the only one that knew how to find its way to such a rare and costly thing as was a truffle in those days.

Chickweed made her fortune. The ten years of truffle-hunting laid the foundation of it, and her own bright industry and energy did the rest. No opposition was ever made to her just claim to the truffles, and for ten years she enjoyed the undisputed privilege of sending the Derry Down Forest truffles to the English market. She was called "lucky," but rather she was intelligent and quick-sighted to see the chances when they came, than merely fortunate in having them.

Her old grandmother came back, not to the wooden hut, but her granddaughter's loving arms, and the well-beloved notch in the old chair.

This return to old habits were all the joys that prosperity could give her. Chickweed would have liked to do much, but the old woman smiled, knowing her own content.

As for the little boys, in course of years they sheltered Chickweed with their love, as she had sheltered them.

As for Worry, riches could do nothing for him. A little food, a little drink, and love, amply bestowed and accepted, make up the sum total of a dog's

wants; and all of these good things he had when Chickweed was so poor and shared her scanty food with him. To say that he was as happy as ever, now that she was rich, is to say that she was faithful, too, and never gave his doggish heart just cause for jealousy.

Chickweed's kindliness to all around her had indeed obtained unusually direct and abundant reward, and that is why her little story may be worth the telling.

But it would be both wrong and foolish to look for such substantial recompense for simple kindnesses as she obtained.

What is certain is this—that kindliness is worth cultivating, as flowers are worth cultivating, for its own beauty and pleasantness; and that, undoubtedly, in some way or another, by the affection it gains, or by the happy self-respect it engenders, it does obtain, unfailingly—reward!



THE IVY GIRL.

THE IVY GIRL.

She lived in times when the scales that weighed out justice to the people were not always so evenly balanced as they are now; and in the punishment that had been meted out to her dear and only brother there was much of spite, private and personal, underneath that justice which was for all eyes to see.

For he had, doubtless, deserved some punishment, having been headstrong and rebellious to a superior in an open and defiant way that that superior, whose love of vengeance was greater than his love of mercy, could not forget. And the foolish young fellow had been imprisoned for a vague space of time, mentioned as "During the king's pleasure."

"The king's pleasure" had lasted, alas! far longer than was necessary to break that turbulent spirit; a little because the man it had so grievously offended was useful, even indispensable, to the king, and wished it; and a little because the very unruliness and thoughtlessness that had procured for him

so fierce an enemy, had ever prevented him from gaining one steady friend.

And though he was wiser now—his wisdom was of little use—he was forgotten!

He had been in prison nearly eighteen months. It was "early days," they told him, for such impatience and despair; but it was just in those "early days" that the agony was greatest. By-and-by, when he should become cramped with confinement, morally and physically, when his senses would be deadened with suffering of mind and body—when he would no longer yearn for life and liberty—but be able to pray for death, and long for it, that would be peace, indeed; but now!

He could not be impatient long, and hope lasted no longer than his impatience. The light left his eyes, the colour faded from his face, and when the eighteen months were passed he was quiet, but with a quiet which was terrible indeed. He had one joy left him. The prisoners were permitted to walk in the court-yard of the prison for one quarter of an hour each day, and once a week his sister came eight miles to see him. She could not do it oftener, for each visit she paid him was at the peril of her life; and it needed, indeed, such faithful love as hers to compass the difficulties and vanquish the terror that beset her every time she came to him.

For it was forbidden to the prisoners, on pain of

severe punishment, to speak or hold any communication whatever with any person of their family or friends.

This was the order, and it served to make her courageous attempts difficult and tedious both, since to her courage she must add such secresy and caution.

On the north side of the court-yard was the great grey stone prison itself; on the south, the outer court and prison doors, and then a road leading to the town, more or less frequented according to the time of day, but always guarded by armed men.

The same road skirted the prison walls eastwards, and was guarded in like manner, but westwards the court-yard walls were built on the very brink of a rocky precipice, below which, amidst great moss-grown boulders, and at a distance down of over three hundred feet, rushed a mass of angry, foaming water.

Beneath the wall there was no pathway large enough for human feet to tread with safety, even although the head that belonged to them should be steadiness itself. The whole was solid rock, and there was a little uneven, somewhat slanting, ledge, stony in some places and crumbling in others, where there was a little earth and a tuft or two of grass half binding it. The prison wall on one side, and on the other—vacancy.

Yet it was along this ledge that she had crept,

clinging desperately to the ivy on the wall as she went, without which it would have been impossible for her to creep at all. For seventy-seven times—once in every week of his imprisonment—had she done this, clad in an ivy-green dress, and with an ivy-green hood over her head, so that she should be scarcely noticeable against the ivy leaves, going and coming back. For when she reached that part of the wall where she saw her brother (the wall slanted north-eastwards) she was quite hidden from passers-by in the road, and could wait safely until the prisoners came into the court-yard.

In order to do this unobserved she taught herself to make church decorations of all kinds—baskets, wreaths, fans, hand-screens and a hundred other trifling conceits — out of ivy-stalks, leaves and tendrils, so that she might have an excuse for her frequent presence in a place where the ivy grew so freely and so abundantly.

Near the corner of the wall, close to the precipice, she would take her stand very early in the morning, having risen at dawn to take her eight mile walk, and there she would work patiently, coming and going frequently into the wood, beyond the prison and elsewhere, out of sight, in order that when the time came for her terrible journey of fifty interminable yards her absence might not be noticed by the sentinel when he came back to the place where he had left her.

When her visit to her brother was over, and she came away, the danger of discovery was greater, especially when the day was wet and the ground soft, for then she could not tell so easily as on dry days, by the sound of his heavy foot-fall, where the sentinel would be when she turned the angle. But he had spurs and arms that jingled, and so far she had always returned to her basket unseen.

Now it was a possible thing to do, or she could not have done it. There was room for her feet, and there was ivy to cling to, but the position was a frightful one to be in. The chances of an involuntary slip were so many, and the consequences of one false step would have been so instantaneously fatal, as far as human intelligence could foresee, that this feat must have been considered a recklessly bold one for the very boldest and strongest to have attempted even once.

But it was not her courage that helped her. She had very little of that. It was that her love was still greater than her nervous terror, and still stronger than her dread of death, and was able to master both!

The sight of that thin wan face, those dear despairing eyes uplifted to hers, those trembling white lips, the thought of what he suffered, were irresistible magnets indeed!

Where was the earthly impediment that could hinder her from going to him when she knew that

the sight of her faithful face must be as blessed to him as the sight of his was agony to her?

And what energy did the thought give her—

"If I stay away one week, he may think I have grown weary and that he is no longer, as he was, my only thought and my only care!"

In the face of this painful reflection dangers faded into mere difficulties, since if Death should walk with her one day, and grasp her unawares, death meant but separation after all, and a separation not caused by any deliberate will of her own.

When the hour arrived for the prisoners to come out, she climbed the wall, not so high here as elsewhere, because of the guard kept by the precipice itself, and topped with a row of stout iron railings, round and about and entwined in which the tenacious ivy had grown for so many years. Had it not been, indeed, for the ivy, her brother must have been content to hear her voice, and not to see her face; for she twined her hands and arms in its branches, she caught at it in handfuls and armfuls. Her heart leapt upwards so eagerly that her limbs were fain to follow, and her will was so strong that her body was ashamed to feel weak, and when she reached the railings, and could rest on the inch or two of stonework margin round the bars, she was comparatively safe provided she held fast, and did not grow giddy.

And then she would press her tender face to the bars, and smile at him with glistening eyes.

They were but fitful glimpses he could have of



her. The bars and the leaves were between them, and he dared not look too intently; but they could always speak in a low voice, for the court-yard was very large, and the prisoners were few.

They always said the same things—

"God bless you, darling."

"God bless you, my boy. Are you as well as you can be?"

"Yes, yes, dear. And you?"

"I am well, quite well; and I am still trying to move the king to mercy."

"If you could always be there to give me courage, Lois."

"My poor Gabriel, take care, the sentinel has turned."

Then he would walk here and there, idly pick up a stone or two and throw it away again, and as soon as the sentinel had turned his back, be there again.

"Lois! I have been thinking all night of that day when you broke my hunting-knife, and I was so fierce. Forgive me. And you cried. I see your little startled face now! Lois, how could I be fierce?"

"Do not look back, my sweet! Look forward! And as to the fierceness, you were a most loving, tempestuous brother. The pain is to see you so very gentle! I know how well you love me; what matters else?"

"Do not forget me. Love me always, Lois."

"Alas!" said she, "what should I do with the days if I did not?"

"Lord! Lord!" he would sob bitterly, "have mercy on me."

"Dear heart. He surely will. Have patience."

"Remember what it is to me to see you. Lois! Lois! you will always come?"

"Remember if I do not, that it is because I cannot, not because I will not."

Then they would talk a little of her life in the precious outer world. Were her chickens thriving? Was the dame's rheumatism always as troublesome?

Had there been many roses this year? Was the pony's leg better? Were all the dogs sound? And did the terrier pup promise to be anything of a dog?

Questions that were asked and answered with cheerful voices for each other's sake.

One day, however, his first greeting was different, and there was a new pain in his face.

"Lois!" said he, "they tell me there is a frightful precipice behind you. Are you sure that it is safe for you to come here on windy days?"

The walls and windows of the prison were too high for the prisoners to see anything but the sky above them, and it was night when they had taken him there.

She shuddered and clutched her bars tighter and tighter.

"No, dear," said she, looking about her in a careless way, "there is a steep bank down to the river, but it is nowhere near here."

"They told me there was a precipice on the west-side. I have tortured myself with fears for you. You are sure that you run no danger, my little Lois?"

"Quite sure."

"How far is it to this steep bank?"

"About three hundred feet," said she, and she thought, as she spoke, "to-night I must surely fall over!"

"Don't come again," said he, wringing his hands.

"My dear!" said she, smiling, "there is nothing dangerous here, it is all flat moorland."

"Really?" said he, re-assured.

"Really."

"Then, when you leave me, you can walk straight on, away from the wall?"

"Straight on," said she, smiling again, yet shuddering, "until I reach the river which is three hundred feet, or so, from here."

So it was, downwards!

When it was time to go, the tears came in torrents on the ivy-leaves; but his eyes were dry.

"Good-bye, little brother, I will come again."

"Good-bye. O, Lois, Lois! good-bye."

At last, one day, she was discovered.

She was ill, sick and faint, and feverish. It was just as much as she could do to reach the angle of the wall, where safety was, safely, but whether she was seen or not she could not help. She must choose between the chance of discovery and instant death. Her brain reeled; her hands had no strength; she dared not bide her time, as usual, and so she came crouching and trembling forward, and just as she reached the corner, a sentinel confronted her, and levelled his gun.

'It is only me, the Ivy Girl. Don't you know?" said she, with trembling lips.

"Where have you been?"

"Only along there, for ivy."

"You have no ivy with you; besides, it is impossible."

"Where else could I have come from?" asked she.

Two men in cloaks had now joined them, and at the sight of them, the sentinel gave way and saluted.

"What was this girl doing; speaking to a prisoner?" said the foremost.

"Sir," said she, desperately, "I was coming—I was trying—I thought"—she could get no further. Fortunately, however, for her, she did not faint: had she fainted, her questioner might, and probably would, have left her to the care of the sentinel, and, pitying her, gone on his way. But she very innocently and unconsciously did better than merely to faint—she opened her beautiful eyes, on the contrary, and there came into them such an expression of mute agony and appeal, that a rather blunted and stunted heart—the one that lay in her questioner's bosom—was unmistakably touched.

"My dear," said he kindly, "we do not wish to harm you; but you can hardly stand. Take my arm."

"Sir," began she.

The second person in the cloak interposed, "are

you aware, young girl," said he, stepping forward, that you are addressing —"

The first speaker lifted his hand, "My good Bevis, silence."

"Bevis—is that man's name Bevis!" cried she, "then who are you?"

"One of authority. Tell your story. You have been endeavouring to effect the escape of a prisoner. Tell the entire truth, and mercy will be shown you. She threw herself on her knees, and Heaven in her dire extremity gave her strength, and words, and thoughts, and arguments.

And she was listened to, at first, with sympathy; afterwards, when she named her brother with a slight frown, but always with interest—possibly because he who listened heard the second side of the story for the first time! Possibly, too, because truth convinces!

"You say you have crawled along that ledge once a week for the last year and a half, merely to say 'good morning' and good-bye' to your brother."

"It gave him comfort, Sir."

"But it is impossible, you must have fallen over."

"No! here I am now."

"But no one would attempt such a thing with so slight an object in view. Confess that you have been endeavouring to effect his escape."

"No, Sir, I had no such hope. There are too

many sentinels in the courtyard. He would be shot."

"I suppose that you consider your brother has been unjustly imprisoned?" interrupted he who had been called Bevis; "But, on the contrary, he has been mercifully dealt with, for the price of insubordination to a superior is death."

"You know well!" cried she, with eyes that were full of fire and tears both; "You know well, how little harm he did. He was his own enemy. Why need you be his enemy too!"

"Do you think I bear malice against a boy?" said he, shrugging his shoulders. "A rat once trapped is best with his neck twisted, or tied so that he cannot do further harm—that's all." And then he whispered in his companion's ear, "The lad is a scamp. The girl is of the same brood, and doubtless an impostor. She knew you were coming this way and ventured a few steps along there and back, in the very nick of time to be seen."

"What has been done as often as seventy-seven times can be done once again," said the other. "Child, your story needs proof, being a serious one; and if true, not to be lightly treated. Has any one ever seen you on your perilous way?"

"No one. Few people come here, and the sentinels never look this way."

"Because, sweetheart, they know that human beings are not flies and cannot crawl along walls!"

"Yet I have done it!"

"How can you prove it?"

"Next week I will!"

"Why not this moment?"

She turned deadly pale. "Now?" said she, pressing her hand to her forehead.; "No—no—no, I could not!"

"You see, it was a falsehood," whispered Bevis.

"Why could you not do it now; that seems strange!" said the other.

"Because——O, have pity, Sir? I can, of course, do it again; but now?—now?—it would be terrible."

"Next week I shall not be here. Besides, what can be done then can be done now."

She groaned aloud. "I feel ill, faint," said she, and leant against the wall.

"Clever little baggage!" whispered Bevis in his friend's ear.

"I much fear, sweetheart," said his friend, who was, alas! for himself and many others, always much influenced by Bevis; "I much fear, sweetheart, that you are telling falsehoods. If your story is true, you can prove it now; but by your terror I see it is not true. I love bravery of all sorts so well, that, were I to be convinced of such bravery as you have told me of, I would indeed feel greatly tempted to use my poor influence to set your brother free. If you are birds of the same nest, he cannot lack daring whose sister is so brave! Yes, Bevis, I mean, for once, what I say."

"Sir," said she, "I know I could not do it now, but I have done it, and will again. Give me time."

"Pshaw!" muttered Bevis.

There was not much in the word itself, but the tone in which it was said stung his companion to the quick.

"Good morrow, sweetheart!" said he, wistfully, it is true, for in his heart of hearts he believed her story. "Learn not to be so ready with your falsehoods, and not to accost strangers so easily;" so saying he turned from her with a muttered, "come, Bevis!" They went a pace or two.

She saw their retreating forms. In a moment she would be too late. She who had mastered so much! Ills so far worse than mere bodily sickness, could she not conquer her languor, her giddiness, her physical, nervous terror? She who had dared so much seventy-seven times for her brother's sake, should she turn coward and faithless at the seventy-eighth?

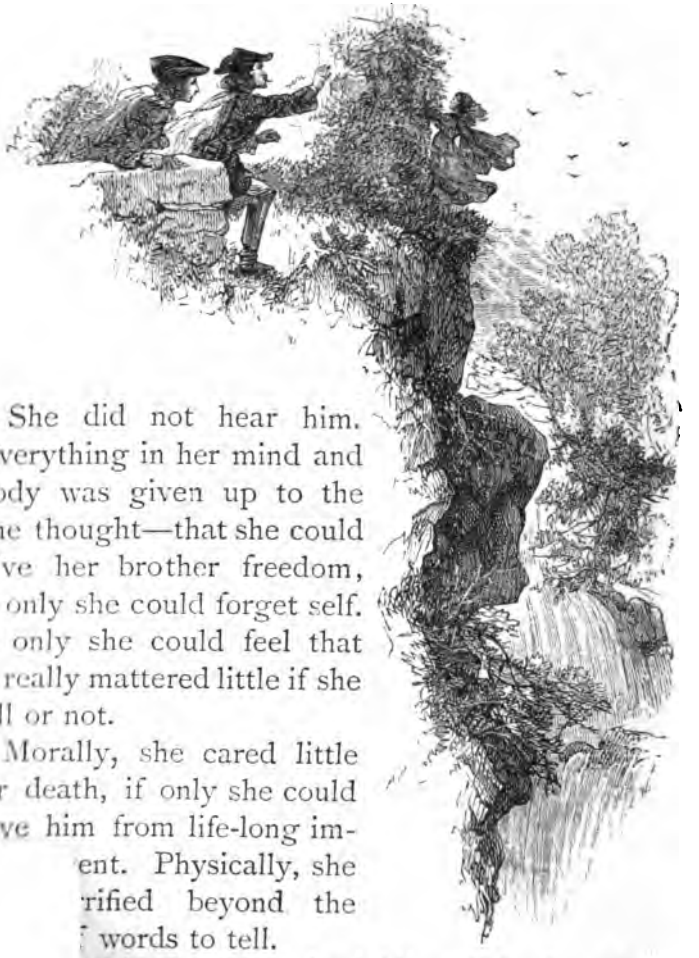
"Stop!" cried she wildly, "I will give you proof. But what assurance will you give me? Am I to lose my life for nothing? You may be false as demons. What is *your* word worth?"

The foremost of the two men, with impulse as natural as it was sudden, threw back his cloak—a large diamond star shone on his breast.

"The king's word is given," said he, with dignity.

She darted from him.

"Stop! stop!" cried the king, darting after her; "Do not go!"



She did not hear him. Everything in her mind and body was given up to the one thought—that she could give her brother freedom, if only she could forget self. If only she could feel that it really mattered little if she fell or not.

Morally, she cared little for death, if only she could save him from life-long im-
ent. Physically, she
rified beyond the
words to tell.

ie back, come back!" cried the king, brother is free!"

Alas! she did not hear him.

"What a girl!" cried the king. "There are such stout hearts among my people, and I not know it! Call to her, Bevis."

And Bevis, ashamed of himself, called to her.

Two or three yards more, and then she stopped.

"What is she doing now? Call her, Bevis."

"I have called her, Sire. She does not hear me. I had not dreamt of this."

"No!" said the king, bitterly. "It was beyond our comprehension. Such purity of love—how should *we* fathom it? Sweetheart, summon all your courage," cried he. "Shall I come to you?"

The king even made one step towards her, and reeled; the abyss was frightful to look upon. "Can no one help her? Bevis, run! fetch help."

Bevis ran; but it was too late. For a moment or two she was strained to the wall; her eyes protruding; her hair on end. The terrible conviction in her heart that she had done this once too often; and then suddenly the clenched hands gave way, the terrified soul was at peace, and she fell.

Now, a merry ending this story has not. How could it? But a cheerful one; for she was soon at rest.

Her body was so light, it was not smashed, but bruised; and at first they all said, "a marvel! —a marvel!"—and thought she might recover.

She did not do that, or wish for it. But she

lived long enough to see her brother free—to soothe his grief—and smile at his remorse. She lived to see tears fall from the king's eyes, and to have the king's word that he would befriend her brother—let him be never so contumacious.

"It is just as well that I should go," said she, "I am not made for happiness."

"No, indeed, sweetheart, you are not!"—said the old dame, her nurse, to whom she spoke—"not for this cruel world's! But wait awhile—this cruel world is not the only one!"

And indeed, no one who looked upon her stilled and peaceful face, some few days afterwards, could doubt that she was happy where she was!

So was their sorrow tempered.

MISS MIGNONETTE.

MISS MIGNONETTE.

If any one had been there to see, that some one might have felt considerably surprised at perceiving such an humbly-dressed little person leaning back in such a splendid carriage. Not, indeed, that she seemed at all out of place there, for her appearance was attractive, her voice and words, when she spoke, were pleasant, and her manner was courteous.

"I think, if you please, Hipposilos, that I will get out here!"

Hipposilos, who was the coachman, answered respectfully, "It is about a couple of miles to the village, Miss Miggonet" (her name was Mignonette).

"Very good. Do you see any one coming?"

Hipposilos looked about him in all four directions with searching eyes. It was a hot summer's day, and nobody was out walking along that hot dusty road that could possibly help it. Only the gadflies were busy, working their mischievous will on the horses' bright smooth sides and inside their tender ears. Sweet tempered patient creatures

were those horses! They gave a stamp or two, and tossed their heads and whisked their tails, and then they shivered all over. But that was all. They did not say "O! bother the flies!" and suddenly take to their heels and run, regardless of consequences, as we should most probably do if we were so pestered.

In the distance there were some faint sounds: a dog barking, a cow lowing, sheep bleating, a hen or two clucking, and the trickle of a tiny water-fall.

"Not a soul!" said Hipposilos.

"Steady, then, will you!"

The little person left the carriage. And Hipposilos handed to her from underneath the box seat, a little bundle, tied up in a cotton handkerchief, a pair of clogs, and a gingham umbrella, smiling as he did so in a manner that was at once respectful and affectionate.

"Ma'am,—Miss Miggonet!" said he.

"Yes, Hipposilos."

"You will take care of yourself, Miss Miggonet?—begging your pardon."

"I will try to do so, Hipposilos. I shall be there, as everywhere, in Heaven's keeping."

"Yes, Miss Miggonet, certainly. But if you would let me hang about the village for a day or two till you're comfortably settled, I should feel easier. Nobody would know me."

"You are over anxious, Hipposilos. Thank you

all the same for your fears. I should be sorry, perhaps, if they were less! But I shall do very well; and now, as I do not intend to move from here until you are out of sight, please have the goodness to turn the carriage round at once. Dont forget to give Rough, Loups, and Nell one bit of sugar every evening; and beg Amanda to feed the cats and birds regularly."

"I'll see to it myself, Miss Miggonet."

"Thank you, Hipposilos, and good-bye to you for the present!"

The carriage was soon out of sight, and when the last sound of the wheels and hoofs had died away in the distance, Miss Mignonette turned in the opposite direction, quite sure that her faithful servant could not turn and follow her now, if even he dared do it, because he could not see where she was going.

She walked briskly along the road, too busy thinking, to feel how scorching the sun was.

It is true, she was coolly dressed in cotton print. Her dress was tidy, but not in its first unrumpled freshness, and it had a neat patch here and there. She wore, too, a rather coarse holland apron. She had on her head a little blue linen sun-bonnet, and her well-mended shoes and stockings were of the very coarsest description. What her thoughts were matters very little. All that can be said about them is that they must have been varied ones; for sometimes she would smile to herself as she went, and

then her face was very pleasant. And sometimes she would look sad and even anxious, and then her face was very pretty. But fortunately the smiles predominated.

After three quarters of an hour's steady walking she reached her destination. This was a little cottage standing by itself at the further end of a large field, some hundred yards back from the road, and half hidden by two or three large oak trees.

The place had been easy to find. She had asked her way some little while ago—

"When you reach the bridge," she was told, "there are two roads—one leads straight on to the village; but you take the one to the left. About five minutes after you leave the high road, there's a sharp turning, and then a clump of trees; the house is behind them."

There was a stile to be crossed, and there was a pathway beaten down in the grass that led to the house. It felt cool and pleasant, but Mignonette did not linger. She was getting very tired, and seemed not a little anxious and nervous.

Such a pretty little dwelling-place it was! The door stood wide open, a cat was asleep on the mat, and there was a starling in a wicker-cage, with a bit of green-baize thrown over the sunwards half of it; and he peered solemnly round the corner at her and said with a wink or two—

"Strawberry! strawberry!"—which if not an

appropriate greeting, was perhaps the best he had to give and at least showed good-will.

Miss Mignonette tapped gently with her knuckles on the door.

There was no answer; so in a few minutes she tapped again.

There was still no answer, so in a few minutes she tapped again, this time very loudly, but no one came.



"Is there anyone there?" cried Mignonette, presently.

"Strawberry?" muttered the starling in the same enquiring tone.

"Anyone here?" cried she again.

No answer; not even from the starling.

What was she to do? It was so burning hot, and she was so tired! She hesitated a moment, then called again. It was impossible that she should call so loudly, and not be heard to the very furthermost ends of such a little building as that, especially as all the doors and windows were open, and the silence outside so complete that you could actually hear the crunch, crunch, of two cows that were eating grass a little distance away.

Evidently, everybody was out, or fast asleep. So she just stepped across the threshold, out of the glare of the sun, into the cool passage. Right through there was a back door, wide open, too, and beyond it a pleasant view of flowers and green leaves. Almost at her elbow there was a door ajar. She could not resist peeping in. It was stiflingly hot. The windows were closed. The fire-place was boarded over, and covered with white paper ribbon. There was a table covered with a blue cloth, on which were books, and a yellow vase full of quivering dried grasses. There were six chairs with their backs to the wall. There were some large shells on the mantel-shelf, and some gilt ornaments encased in yellow leno. There were antimacassars everywhere—even on a little round table that stood in the bow window.

"Evidently!" thought Mignonette, "they don't live here!"

The passage was crossed in one step, but, as the

door opposite was shut, she knocked as a mere matter of form before she opened it, because, of course, if anybody had been there, they must have come out before.

It was a bed-room; less hot, because the windows were wide open, and the green curtains drawn together. There were three little beds all of a row; one large wash-hand stand with three ewers and basins; one large chest of drawers; three sets of pegs and three wooden chairs at the feet of the beds; three brushes and combs on the dressing-table. Everything was in threes, in fact, and though it all looked very tidy and pretty, there was scarcely room enough to turn oneself round in, and Mignonette went a little further on.

At the back of the house, which was cool and pleasant, was the kitchen, paved with red brick, and as clean as a row of new pins, and—as far as metal things went—just as shining. Opposite, behind the sitting-room, was the prettiest place of all. It had a red brick floor also, but now it was almost entirely covered with matting, and in winter it would be spread with a piece of warm carpet. There was a table covered with dark oil-cloth; a little dish of flowers lay on it, a book or two, a paper-case and inkstand. There were work-boxes and a pile of undarned stockings. In the chimney corner were gardening tools and a fishing rod. Bundles of herbs hung on the walls from iron nails; and one or two

old pictures, faded and indistinct, and a case containing two stuffed birds of a rare sort, namely, a *white* blackbird, with flaming red bead eyes, and a young bittern with a piece of rush in his beak, looking round in a surprised manner at nothing in particular.

Here, too, on the table, were three bowls, each covered with a plate.

Mignonette lifted one plate, and after a moment's hesitation, being exceedingly thirsty, she carried the bowl to her lips. It was barley water, strongly flavoured with cinnamon and lemon peel. She put it down with a shudder, for she did not happen to like the combination. The next bowl contained cold tea. This was a trifle nicer, but it was far too sweet for Mignonette's taste, and she put that down too.

The third bowl was full of delicious cold milk. Now, Mignonette was exceedingly thirsty by this time—so exceedingly thirsty that she could not resist the temptation to drink this delightful draught! She lifted the bowl to her lips with both hands, and drained it to the very last drop! When she had done that she gasped for breath, put down the basin and blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Dear, dear! what a dreadfully rude thing to do!" murmured she, "what shall I say to them. I am afraid they will think me very impertinent."

She was so dismayed that she felt quite faint, and sat herself down—plump—in the nearest chair to recover her composure.

The milk, however, being swallowed, there was an end of the matter. It is such an exceedingly impolite thing to do, to walk straight into somebody else's house, and to drink up somebody else's milk without being invited to do so, that there is nothing to be done, when the matter is discovered, but to humbly apologise.

"I will apologise," said Mignonette, "and that so sincerely and humbly, that they will be quite disarmed. Anyhow!" added she, jumping from her seat, "I need not punish myself by sitting in this hard straight-backed chair till they come. My feet scarcely reach the ground. I feel just like a parrot on a perch! That arm chair with the cushions looks very comfortable. I might just rest myself for five minutes, and then go and wait in the field for them."

No sooner said than done. She settled herself comfortably among the cushions, and closed her eyes.

Presently, however, she sat straight up, with a sigh and a yawn.

"Well! of all the miserably uncomfortable hot things in summer, a cushioned arm chair is the worst. How hot it is! I wonder how long they will be? I wonder what they will think of me, and

what I shall think of them? I wonder if there is a seat in the garden? It strikes me that I ought not to be sitting here in their private sitting-room. I do so keep forgetting that I am only a little servant girl, come after a place!"

Up she jumped forthwith, and ran into the cool back garden.

A seat? There was not only a seat, but a perfect bower of delight, in the shape of a wide-spreading willow tree, under which was a large wicker-work arm chair. In five minutes from the moment that found her comfortably seated in it, with stretched-out, tired-out little legs, she was fast asleep, her eyes shut tight and her mouth wide open. And, there, let us leave her.

"I shall not even return any letters that she may write for the future. I shall not take any notice of them. That's what I shall do!" said number one, in a decided tone of voice.

"You mean 'that's what I shall not do!' I quite agree with you. That will be the only way to put an end to the matter," said number two, cheerfully.

"I shall do as you both do, of course," said number three, with the faintest possible sigh.

They were walking towards a certain before-mentioned cottage in precisely the opposite direction to that in which Mignonette had come.

The sun was still pelting down on the hard dusty

roads, and though they had cotton dresses on, and sun-bonnets, they were all three very hot and tired, and consequently a little cross.

"I never heard of such upstart persecution," said number one.

"I think she wishes to patronise us—if she could!" said number two.

"Yes—if she could," said number three; "but she can't!"

They were three healthy-looking country girls, very much alike, but with a marked difference between them. Number one was much the tallest, and somewhat angular in form. Number two was the broadest and plumpest, and had the liveliest voice. Number three was the shortest and slimmest, and had the gentlest manner. But all three had the same bright brown hair, the same fresh complexion, and the same round brown eyes, and the same even white teeth.

"No, indeed!" said number one; "I would sooner starve!"

"Sooner starve!" echoed number two, quite cheerfully.

"Starve!" murmured number three, with a nod of acquiescence and a faint tone of doubt in her voice.

"I will read her last letters over to you once more, shall I, girls. Do not let us decide anything too hastily."

The two other sisters were ready to listen, and so number one began directly—

"My dear Cousins,

"Your letter has pained me deeply. I am not so foolish as not to know how bitter a disappointment our uncle's will must have been to you, who were always considered to be co-heiresses, and I quite know how unjust it must seem (and, indeed, I myself think it was not just) that he should have left his large fortune to a niece of whom he knew so little, and should have so completely ignored the existence of the very three with whose parents he had lived until he went to America. I can only account for his strange conduct by supposing that the misunderstanding that unfortunately existed between your parents and himself was more serious than the rest of the family imagined it to be.

"Now, dear cousins, I cannot alter this will, and I cannot even share the money with you. You know that it is left to me in such a manner that I may use it but not part with any of it. All I can do is again and again to entreat you to come and live with me and be my sisters, and believe that I will do all I can to make you forget that the money is not absolutely yours. Do tell me if I may go to see you, or if you will come here—I do so long to know you all three.

"I am, your affectionate

"MIGNONETTE."

"No!" said Jonquil (that was number one), "We are very poor, but we are independent. Miss Mignonette greatly mistakes us if she thinks we are the kind of girls to fetch and carry for her for the sake of a few fine dresses!"

"I do so object to her ridiculous name. Now our three names are fanciful of course, but not ridiculous or affected. If our parents were as flower-struck as her's, at least they gave us useful homely names, of which we need not be ashamed. But 'Mignonette!' 'Mignonette!' my dears, is simply absurd!" said Buttercup, who was number two.

"Absurd," murmured number three, who was called Daisy, and who in her heart thought Mignonette a sweetly romantic name.

"Here she says, in the last letter but one," went on Jonquil—"'Why will you not answer me? I am so sorry that I have all the money, but there is so much of it, quite enough for all four of us! I shall be, indeed, unhappy, if you will not be friends.' Rubbish," added Jonquil, in the same breath, "though, perhaps, it is a strong expression to use."

"It is," said Buttercup, "but, nevertheless, rubbish is the word!"

"I am afraid so!" said Daisy, sighing.

The last letter was not so short:—

"How unhappy I am! You don't believe

in me at all. I will try to convince you of my good faith. I send you a little money for ribbons and charities. Oh, my dears, do not send it back. I want to tell you one thing. Money, when properly used, is a great blessing. What am I to say to you? You do not know how wretched you make me!"

"That is simply rude," said Jonquil, as she folded the letters and put them in her pocket. "Of course, money is a blessing—and she is blessed in our stead."

"But our answer was conclusive," said Daisy.

"Yes," said Buttercup, with a laugh. "We sent the money back, and said—what did we say, Jonquil?"

"We said this—'We do not wish to have any acquaintance or correspondence with our unjust uncle's heiress. We are not greedy of wealth, and we are proud. We can work for our living, but we cannot be your dependents. Our requirements are few and we need no help. We wish you good-bye. We hope you will think no more about the matter, and will refrain from attempting to patronise us. Jonquil, Buttercup and Daisy.'

"Since then we have returned, unopened, I do not know how many letters! And I must say that I think we have acted with spirit," added Jonquil.

"Yes! we certainly have acted with plenty of

spirit—if that is desirable," said Buttercup, doubtfully; "but I have not quite such a contempt for money as you have, Jonquil."

"I should not have objected to a pair of new shoes and half-a-dozen new pocket-handkerchiefs, if she had sent them to me," said Daisy, with some hesitation, however.

"Daisy!" exclaimed Jonquil.

"Oh! come now, Daisy, that 's mean!" said Buttercup.

"It is, I feel mean," said Daisy, desperately.

The other two were silent. There was a scornful smile on Jonquil's lips, and even Buttercup's eyebrows were slightly raised in surprise.

But, perhaps, their shoes and handkerchiefs were not so worn as Daisy's.

"I wish we could have found a servant to-day," said Daisy, presently, just to change the subject.

"Well! we all wish that, I suppose," said Jonquil, snappishly. "How insane of you, Daisy, to keep repeating 'I wish;' of course, we all of us wish."

"I should like help in making the pickles and preserves, that 's all," said Daisy, meekly.

"And I should like to know for how many more mornings I shall be obliged to get up to churn at four o'clock. You don't know how sleepy I am from four to five, Jonquil! Now, if five o'clock was not too late—"

"And if making preserves was not such hot work—"

"If 'ifs' and 'ands' were pots and pans—What should we do for Spanish fans!" said Jonquil, majestically.

But the quotation not being majestic in itself, was received with such a laugh, that after looking amazed for a moment, Jonquil laughed too.

Thus was harmony restored.

"No, but seriously, Jonquil, I do so want to do up our summer bonnets; and how can I do it, if I am always pottering in the kitchen?"

"And what time has one for the poets, if one is always skimming cream and milking cows?"

"Milking cows and skimming cream, my love, you cannot reverse the operations. And you say nothing of the scrubbing I must shortly give the house if we don't find a servant. The mere thought of it makes my knees ache!"

By this time they had reached their own home, and had crossed the stile, and were rustling through the long dry grass towards the house door.

The starling was asleep, but he opened one eye, and said "Strawberry?"

"It's too hot to stand talking to you just now, my dear!" said they, and passed on into the shady passage.

"Girls! Did we leave this bed-room door open? Who was the last to leave the room?"

"I was," said Buttercup, "and I shut it. And pray don't take that air of grand inquisitor, Jonquil, or you 'll make me cross."

"The door opened itself," said Jonquil, with a smile.

"Possibly; in fact evidently. It's hot in here, isn't it?"

They took off their bonnets and tippets, and laid them on their beds, and hurried out. By-and-by, when the sun went down, the room would be habitable; just now it was not.

"What a good thought that was of yours, Daisy, to leave something ready for us to drink the moment we came in. I am so thirsty."

Jonquil went straight into the back room. Buttercup stayed behind to pat the cat; and Daisy waited, because Buttercup and the cat filled the width of the passage.

"Why, good gracious!" cried Jonquil; "come here, come here! I left a plate over my barley-water, and somebody has been here and taken it off."

They rushed into the room after her.

"Why, look here, look here! Somebody has been sipping at my tea; there's the teaspoon in it now!"

"Oh! oh! somebody has drunk up every drop of my milk!" cried Daisy. They looked first at each other, then round the room.

"Somebody has been sitting in my chair; the cushion is all awry!" cried Buttercup.

"And in mine!" cried Jonquil. "The anti-macassar has fallen off the back!"

"Oh! oh!" cried Daisy, for the second time, as she pointed to the window; "there's somebody sitting under the tree in my wicker arm chair, at this very minute, I declare!"

They made a rush towards the wicker chair, but they did not wake Mignonette, whose mouth was still parted in sleep, and whose long lashes still lay darkly on her delicate cheek.

"Well! such cool impertinence as this I never did see!" exclaimed Jonquil.

"She knows what is comfortable," said Buttercup, with a chuckle.

"How lovely she is!" said Daisy, and forgave her on the spot for her thirstiness!

"If she is as good as she is pretty, what a girl of girls she must be!" said Buttercup, who was neither quick-tempered nor tender-hearted, but practical and just.

At that moment, Mignonette opened her eyes—saw the six round brown ones staring hard at her, and sat up in her chair too confused with her long sleep to jump to her feet at once.

"Girl," said Jonquil, severely, "where do you come from?"

"Who are you?" asked Buttercup.



"MIGNONETTE . . . HAD RISEN TO HER FEET."

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"Was it you who drank my milk? I don't mind at all," said Daisy.

Mignonette had by this time risen to her feet and had found her voice.

"If you please, I heard that you had been enquiring for a house servant, and I am in want of a place."

"Who recommends you?" asked Jonquil.

"What can you do?" enquired Buttercup.

"Yes, who recommends you, and what can you do?" echoed Daisy.

They had all spoken at once.

"Oh, if you please—" began Mignonette.

"Can you cook?"

"Churn?"

"Make jam?"

Again they had all spoken at once.

"Oh, yes, please let me explain—"

"Are you good tempered?"

"And active?"

"Yes—willing and active?"

Mignonette looked from one to the other with a perturbed face.

"I will tell you what I am in a very few words. I am a friendless girl who will do as she is told, and strive her very best to gain your goodwill. I am not a clever cook, but a clean one. I am not a strong housemaid, but a willing one; and as far as references go, I can, I think, content you."

So saying, she handed a letter to the three sisters in a well-known handwriting, that of a farmer whose farm lay some ten miles from their village, and who was one of the most respected landowners of the whole country round. He wrote in high terms of the young girl, Dilly, for whose honesty and industry he would vouch, and who he believed to be in every way a suitable handmaid for the Misses Jonquil, Buttercup and Daisy.

"This is quite enough," said Jonquil, when she and her sisters had read the letter, "and if my sisters agree, I shall be willing to try what you can do."

"I am quite willing," said Buttercup.

"And so am I," said Daisy.

Some few more questions were asked, and this time answered coherently, and then Jonquil said, with a little hesitation—

"You were a little—what shall I say—it was scarcely polite of you to walk into our house and sip our drinks, was it?"

"It was exceedingly rude of me; but you will not find me rude for the future."

"Then we will say no more about it," said Jonquil, kindly, and stepping forward she took Mignonette by the hand and kissed her cheek. "You are welcome. I trust we shall be good friends," said she, simply.

This example was immediately followed by

Buttercup and Daisy, all three girls smiling encouragingly. But the tears stood in the new servant-maid's eyes, and her face was very pale.

"I am sure you have loving hearts," said she, gently; "please heaven we may all do our duty to each other."

A year passed away; a little more, indeed, than a year, for summer was gone, and the nights were cool enough to make a small wood fire a pleasant sight. In the very early morning there was sometimes a suspicion of frost, and a general fresh crispness about everything, that was grateful, indeed, to people who had panted through the hot flaccid summer. The very thought of winter was pleasant. It would not be there for some months yet, but it was on its way, and so were the long pleasant evenings when they sat cosily at work together, and would call to Dilly to bring her knitting and sing songs to them, and tell them wonderful stories.

This Dilly! What a revolution she had made in that cottage among those three young girls! Upon what a pedestal of tacitly acknowledged superiority she stood! How comparatively ignorant she had been at first of many things, but how quick-witted, how charming a pupil she had been! How far she had outstripped her teachers now, and what invaluable and general help was hers.

To begin with: what dresses, and bonnets, and mantles she had made for them out of mere

of the month, you put chestnuts on the fire, and the first one that cracks, wins."

"Wins what?"

"This is it," explained Dilly. "You each choose a chestnut, and then you put them on a shovel over a blazing fire, and the person whose chestnut cracks first may wish for whatever he or she likes, as for some particular thing to happen—"

"And does it?" asked Buttercup.

"There 's no harm in trying," said Dilly. "And to-night there is a full moon, and it 's a Saturday, and the fifteenth of the month."

"Rubbish!" said Jonquil.

"We can't all be so wise as you are, Madam. Now, I call this amusing," said Daisy.

"So do I, Daisy," said Buttercup.

"Babies!"

But, nevertheless, Dilly was told to bring her shovel and three fat chestnuts, and operations for the trial were at once commenced.

"I feel like the ancient Druids at their mysterious rites," said Daisy, presently.

"Like all of them, or only one? And there were Druidesses, my dear. Besides, to say 'ancient' Druids is mere waste of words. There are no modern ones."

"Which chestnut do you choose, Miss Jonquil?" asked Dilly.

"The right hand one."

"And you, Miss Buttercup?"

"The left hand one, Dilly."

"Then the middle one is yours, Miss Daisy."

They watched, each one her chestnut, with breathless interest—Jonquil not the least eagerly of the three.

Presently, one gave a tremendous crack that made all four girls jump. And with such energy did it crack, that it very nearly rolled itself off the shovel into the fire.

It was Daisy's!

"Mind that you wish for something that you are quite sure to get!" said Jonquil.

"Yes," said Buttercup; "because then, of course, you are sure not to be disappointed, Daisy."

Daisy smiled. A little gentle sarcasm might be permitted to persons whose chestnuts had not cracked at all.

"Isn't it strange?" said she. "All the day long, before Dilly told me about the chestnuts, I've been wishing something. Do you know I should *so* like to see this Cousin Mignonette of ours. I do so often wonder what she is like."

"Daisy!" said Jonquil, in utter amazement.

"Daisy!" echoed Buttercup.

"Is that your wish, Miss Daisy?" asked Dilly.

"I should trust not," said Jonquil, very coldly.

"I hope not," said Buttercup, shaking her head.

"It's about as sensible a wish as the first," said Jonquil, rising, so as to put an end to this foolish affair.

A month had not passed before Daisy's wish was granted.

One lovely November morning—for November mornings are very lovely sometimes in the country—when the sun was shining brightly, and the ground was hard and glittering with frost, a great yellow chariot and pair, with two superbly attired men-servants, with powdered hair, hanging on by straps at the back, drove up in front of the stile and stopped, the men-servants forthwith descending from their places, and, aided by each other, and their gold-tipped staffs, coming over the stile up the field and towards the house.

The commotion they caused was considerable: the bird screamed loudly, and flew panting to the furthermost end of his cage; the cat scrambled into the back garden, carrying a door-mat half way down the passage with her.

Jonquil, duster in hand, rushed out to confront the intruders; Buttercup, who was upstairs, popped her head and half of her body over the balustrades; and Daisy, who was making the beds with Dilly, dropped her clean pillow-cases and ran behind her door for the same purpose.

"If you please, will you give this note to Miss Jonquil, or Miss Buttercup, or Miss Daisy," said

one of the men-servants, presenting a little folded paper.

"I am Miss Jonquil," said she, putting down her duster.

The two men-servants touched their foreheads simultaneously, and stood like two statues while Jonquil opened her note.

Imagine the breathless suspense, and the equally breathless attention paid by the other three girls.

"I must consult my sisters," said Jonquil, who had merely glanced at the contents of the note; "there is an answer to be given. Will you step into the passage?"

The two men-servants again touched their foreheads respectfully.

"Daisy, you are in there, I think, and you too, Dilly; please to come with me; and, Buttercup, may I trouble you to step downstairs?"

"Here I am," said Daisy, trying to speak indifferently, as she followed Jonquil.

"Yes, Jonquil," said Buttercup, trying hard not to jump down stairs three steps at a time and tear the note from placid Jonquil—Jonquil who knew what was in it.

"Girls," said Jonquil, in tones almost of awe, when they had entered their back sitting room, "who is Lady Pazienza?"

Lady Pazienza? None of them knew the name.

"She writes to us—here is her letter. As we

cannot all see to read it at once, shall I read it aloud?"

There being eager assent to this, Jonquil read as follows:—

"If the young girls, Jonquil, Buttercup, and Daisy, care to give pleasure to a very old lady, they will come to see her and pass the day with her this very day. They are entreated to make no addition to their usual morning dress beyond the necessary wraps. All they have to do is to put on their cloaks and hoods, and to step at once into the carriage that has been sent to fetch them. They are reminded that a ready compliance with the request of an old lady will be the truest politeness they can show her.

"If they are simple, unaffected girls, fond of flowers, books, and goodies of all sorts, Lady Pazienza thinks they will come. If they are foolish, stuck-up little ninnies, with a great sense of their own importance, she knows they will stay away."

After the letter had been read, it was handed from one to the other, that each might read and verify for herself.

"Miss Jonquil," said Dilly, "perhaps those men-servants are thirsty. May I offer them some milk?"

"Certainly," said Jonquil, scarcely hearing what she had said.

Dilly caught up a jug of milk that happened to be on the table and ran out to the house door.

"Where is Hipposilos?"

"In the little wood yonder, Miss Minnynet, the Willow Copse they call it."

"Very good. With horses, of course?"

"With the bay mare for you, Miss Minnynet, and Prince."

"Is everything in readiness at home?"

"Everything, Miss Minnynet."

"Has Hipposilos asked about the short cuts?"

"He has, Miss Minnynet. There's a cross bridle-road which will save you four or five miles."

"The carriage must be driven slowly."

"Yes, Miss Minnyn——"

"Hush! the young ladies are coming." But they were not coming. The sitting-room door had opened, but it was only Daisy, who put out her head and called—"Dilly, come here if you please."

Dilly ran back.

"Dilly," said they, "we cannot refuse, can we?"

"Not unless you particularly object to make Lady Pazienza's acquaintance," said Dilly, in that decided way which was so often so great a help to the three young mistresses.

"And why should we do that?" asked one.

"Why, indeed!" exclaimed Dilly.

"I would not hurt her feelings for worlds," said Daisy.

"And why should we?" asked another.

"Yes, why should you?" repeated Dilly.

"Of course it 's an odd invitation," said Jonquil.

"I don't see that," said Dilly. "It 's just Miss Daisy's wish come true."

"In a positively startling manner!" said Daisy, who looked quite overcome at the idea.

"It will be a nice change for you all," said Dilly, seeing that they hesitated.

"Besides, I should not like Lady Pazienza, whoever she may be, to think we are silly 'stuck-up little ninnies, with a great sense of our own importance,'" said Jonquil, who was re-reading the letter to herself.

"No, indeed!" said they all in chorus.

"But I wish we might dress ourselves prettily," said Buttercup.

"I am sure you look very nice," said Dilly, and so they did. Each girl had on a clean print dress and neat collars and cuffs, a little bow of ribbon at their necks, and glossy well-arranged hair; what could be prettier?

"We might slip on our pink muslins," said Daisy.

"But," said Buttercup, "Lady Pazienza knows very well that country-girls don't put on fine muslin dresses in the morning to work about in, and she will think that we preferred having our own way to paying due regard to her wishes."

"True," said Jonquil; "it would be impolite."

"Had we not better run and put our cloaks on at once," said Daisy, who was impatient to be off.

"It seems a very unusual thing to do," said Buttercup, hesitating.

"The lady may have only just come into this part of the country," said Dilly, "and she may desire to form a circle of acquaintances."

"Oh! come now, Dilly!" said Buttercup, smiling.

"Do let us go," said Daisy; "please don't let us snub Lady Pazienza, too!"

"Your remark, Daisy, is unfortunate, and shows a great want of tact," said Jonquil, in dignified tones.

"So it is, indeed!" cried Dilly, heartily. "Now don't look at me in that astonished way, dear mistresses, but run and pop on your things and try all you can to enjoy your visit."

Dilly's decisive manner was very catching.

"You will take care of the house, Dilly?"

"Oh yes! Miss Jonquil."

"Then shall we go, girls?"

"Yes! yes!" they cried gladly, and ran into the passage and into their little three-bedded room.

"You can go to the carriage," said Dilly, as she passed the men-servants, "the young ladies are going with you."

The next five minutes all was laughter and hurry-skurry.

"Do let me brush my hair."

"A regular fairy tale invitation, isn't it?"

"I feel half afraid!"

"Nonsense! I don't!"

"Where is my other glove?"

"Have you another big pin?"

"When shall we be back, I wonder?"

"Keep the doors locked if we are late."

"Isn't this fun?"

"Do I look tidy?"

"I wonder what she is like!"

"Wonder in the carriage, and make haste now," said Dilly, giving a helping hand right and left.

The next moment they were all walking across the field towards the carriage, three as bonny fresh-faced young girls as one would wish to see. All in their work-a-day clothes, too, but with such small added embellishments as best neckties and gloves, and a hastily plucked rose at their belts, which roses, poor things, had been for some hours peeping in at their windows, and now paid the penalty of their intrusion.

Being country girls, they made nothing of the stile, and compassed it gracefully and quickly. The carriage door was opened, the steps were let down, and there came to them a faint whiff of carriage-lining—the scent of mingled leather and cloth—more fascinating by far, to their unsophisticated little noses, than any mere odour of wild thyme or

honeysuckle could have been; and they got in with heightened colour and fluttering breath.

"I'm so sorry, Daisy, that there are not three front seats," whispered Buttercup, hastily, as they took their places.

"I am quite comfortable, dear Buttercup," said Daisy, with a little glance, in which was so much fun, that Dilly was forced to bite her lips to prevent a too sudden laugh. The back seat, which Daisy had to herself, left nothing to be desired by one whose only rides had been in tax-carts.

"Good bye!" said Dilly, so earnestly, and so affectionately, that her three mistresses smiled.

"Dear Dilly, we shall meet again!" said they, putting each a hand out of the window for her to take.

"One never knows when, or how!" said Dilly, in whose eyes stood the bright sparkling tears.

"Take care of the house, and, above all, take care of yourself!"

The carriage rolled away, slowly enough, but not too slowly to please the wondering happy girls, who found quite enough to say to each other to keep them pleasantly occupied during a week of carriage drives. And when Dilly had seen the last of it, and could no longer hear the sound of carriage wheels, she ran back to the house.

If only Jonquil, Buttercup, and Daisy could have seen what she did when she was by herself! First, she fed the starling, and gave it fresh sand and

water; there was certainly nothing unusual in that! And then instead of hanging the cage outside the house, she hung it inside the house; and there was undoubtedly something most unusual in that! Then she went into every room in the house, kitchen, larder, dairy and all, and carefully shut the doors and windows and fastened them. After that she sat her down and wrote a little note, which she placed on the pincushion on the toilet table in the bed-room of the girls.

"There!" said she; "if they return without me they will see that. If I return with them, we will laugh over it together."

When that was done, she opened some drawers, and without much ceremony she took out a rather shabby, but clean, black stuff skirt, which was Jonquil's, and a thick short black jacket, which was Buttercup's, and very much too large for her, and a little stuff hood which was Daisy's, and dressed herself hastily in these borrowed garments.

This done, and she was not more than ten minutes in the doing of all this, she let herself out at the back door, locking it, and putting the key carefully in her pocket. Then, lifting her skirt, which was much too long for her, in both hands, she ran up the back garden into a field beyond it, and across that down into the wood beyond it, a plantation of willow trees rather, that nestled in a hollow to the left.

There she paused awhile with bated breath to think and listen.

By-and-by—perhaps before she could have had time to count a quarter of a hundred—she heard a distant snort.

"T-r-r r!—t-r-r-r!"

"There they are!" cried she, joyously, and then lifted her clear soft voice—

"Hipposilos—los—los!" smiling to herself.

Not that it was Hipposilos who had snorted, of course, but his horses.

A voice said "Here!" and then there was a renewed sound of snorting and a tramping of hoofs, and presently a sight of two pretty brown horses' heads showing through the boughs.

"Make haste! make haste!" cried Mignonette. "I will ask you how you are, Hipposilos, when we are on our way."

"There is plenty of time, Miss Miggonet. We shall go twice as fast as the carriage, and I know of short cuts that will make the road a matter of five miles shorter. The bay mare is in good order, and you'll not be afraid of a leap or two, Miss Miggonet?"

Hipposilos permitted himself to smile as he said this, and Mignonette smiled too as she sprang into her saddle.

In two minutes they were off! What a ride it was to be sure! They galloped up hill, and trotted down

hill; they leapt hedges; they popped over gates; they scrambled up banks; they only drew rein here and there, in very shady lanes, just to take breath, and on they went again with new relish; for Mignonette was as good a rider as she was a fearless one, and the other three, man and horses, had been born to the exercise! There were fully ten miles of this work before they came within sight of a far-distant hill, covered with trees, some bare of leaves, others brown and red, and very few green, in the midst of which a white house stood, looking in the dim distance like a great stiff new-born mushroom.

"They are not in sight yet, Hipposilos, I hope," said Mignonette, anxiously.

"No, Miss Miggonet. They can't be. We have done these ten miles extra quickly. And they've quite fifteen miles to come by the road—and that very slowly too. They won't be anywhere near hereabouts for another hour."

"You have arranged everything most beautifully, Hipposilos. You have your orders for to-night?"

"Yes, Miss Miggonet. I will be in readiness."

"Then that is all I want of you until then."

"I do hope you will be able to persuade the young ladies. It's a lonesome life for you, Miss Miggonet," said Hipposilos.

"I hope so too," said Mignonette.

Another sharp gallop brought them to the house, which Mignonette entered.

If the truth were told, at the end of the second hour the three girls were getting rather tired of their jog-trotting drive along country roads, and had become not a little weary, and anxious for their journey's end.

"I never was in such a slow conveyance," said Jonquil.

"Except once, when we went to Church in an empty hay-cart," said Buttercup.

"My dear! one expects to crawl in hay-carts, but in a carriage one expects to go fast."

"If we had been cream this morning, we should certainly be butter by this time," said Daisy, reflectively.

"And if we were silly-Billies this morning, we might be Tom-noddies by this time, mightn't we," said Jonquil. This was severe of her; but Daisy's smile, that said so plainly, "I am glad that you said 'we,'" was ample retaliation.

"Here 's the lodge," said Buttercup, presently, beneath her breath.

"The what?" asked they, whispering too—

"Hush! not so loud. The lodge."

"Oh!"

"Oh!"

They were all eyes and ears for the next few minutes. What lovely flowers! What a splendid

gravel road! What a lawn! and what a lordly peacock strutting thereon! What a delicious crunch-crunching of heavy wheels on gravel! What everything, in fact! Pleasure that was confusion certainly, but confusion that was also pleasure!

The carriage stopped before a large glass door. The carriage-door was opened, the steps let down.

Jonquil descended tranquilly and rather majestically. Buttercup quickly and delightedly; but Daisy had the cramp in her toe, and staggered so ungracefully to the ground that she could not help laughing, though the moment was a solemn one.

An elderly woman-servant came forward to meet them, and told them that unfortunately her mistress, Lady Pazienza, had been obliged to leave the house for an hour or two. She had received an urgent message from a friend, and had gone to see her. Would the young ladies be so kind as not to wait for her, but take some refreshment by themselves? Orders had been left that afterwards the young ladies were to be shown over the house and grounds, which Lady Pazienza trusted would interest and amuse them, and help to pass the time of her absence.

Jonquil, who generally spoke for all three girls, made answer that her sisters and herself would be pleased to do as Lady Pazienza had seen fit to arrange, and were much obliged to her for her fore-

thought, "for," added she, with much simplicity, "we are all very hungry."

The woman at once led them into a large dining-room, and begged them to take off their cloaks and hoods, and pointed out to them a square table spread with everything likely to prove tempting to a trio of healthy young appetites.

"You will find here, young ladies, everything that you may require. If, however, you should need anything further, will you press this button. That will summon me." So saying, she left the room.

"It is exactly like a fairy tale," whispered Daisy.

"And the invisible attendant with cat's paws is changed into an important old lady in black silk," said Buttercup.

"And we are the Princesses," said Jonquil; "just three of us. No! four of us. Do you see that her place is laid?"

"Do you notice that all four places are alike. The table is square and the four high-backed chairs are the same?"

"Yes, how strange."

They did not linger long at lunch. They were too curious to see what would happen next to feel deeply interested in jellies, creams or cakes. So it was not very long before they pressed the little button to summon their attendant. She came directly.

"If the young ladies are ready to look over the house, the house is ready to be looked over," she said, smiling.

"We are quite ready," said Jonquil.

"Then it is my duty to further acquaint you, young ladies, with my lady's wishes. I must tell you that my lady is rather an odd person."

The sudden smile that came into each of the fresh young faces before her, told their informant that the three young ladies were as convinced of Lady Pazienza's oddity as she was herself; but that having accepted her invitation, they were prepared to give every way to it.

"My lady wishes that one young lady, Miss Jonquil, should visit the lower part of the house; that Miss Buttercup should look over the upper part, and that Miss Daisy should visit the gardens and stables; each young lady alone. And that her inspection finished, each should return to the room in which we are now."

"We are ready," said Jonquil.

"Will you then follow me?" said their attendant, addressing Daisy, who rose immediately and put on her cloak and hood.

She then followed her conductress out of the room, through a glass doorway to the right at the back of the house, and into a conservatory, from which a flight of stone steps led into the garden.

"There is the garden, ma'am. Beyond the

garden and behind the shrubbery you will find the orchard and the river. To your right is a summer-house. The grounds are not large you will find, but are exceedingly well kept; that winding pathway to the left leads to the stables."

"I will look at everything with the attention it deserves, for I never saw a prettier place in my life," said Daisy.

The other bowed, and shut the glass door after the already retreating Daisy, and then she went back to the dining-room.

"Ma'am," said she, addressing Buttercup, "will you come with me?"

This time she only led the way to the foot of the principal staircase, and having told her she was free to go into all the rooms she liked, but that the ones most worthy her notice had their doors ajar, left her to go upstairs by herself and went back to Jonquil.

"The dining-room, ma'am," said she, "you already know. That door to the right leads into the morning-room. The door on the opposite side of the passage facing this room is the library door. The passage on the same side, nearer the house door, leads to my lady's studio." Having said this she once more retired.

It was sometime before this housekeeper heard, downstairs in her own room, which was beneath the

dining-room, the sound of footsteps above her head.

Evidently the three girls had found plenty to look at.

Strangely enough they all came back to the dining-room together.

Daisy ran up the garden steps and through the conservatory just as Jonquil came out from the little passage leading to Lady Pazienza's studio, and Buttercup, who had been watching for her sisters on the first landing, so as not to be the first to be finished, ran downstairs to meet them.

All three girls seemed much excited—Jonquil was very pale, Daisy was much flushed, and Buttercup's eyebrows were as far from her eyes as they would go; and they all spoke at once.

"Oh! what *do* you think—?"

"Just fancy this!"

"I've something to tell you that—"

"Come into the dining-room," said Jonquil.

And into the dining-room they ran, and shut the door behind them, and then they all spoke at once again.

"Isn't it strange—"

"Let me tell you—"

"What can she mean—"

"Listen to me," said Jonquil, desperately. "You know what we are, all of us. We shall never get to the end of the story if we all talk at once.

Daisy is the youngest; let her begin and say what she has to say, and then let Buttercup go on, and I will be last; only, for goodness sake, don't let us all talk at once!"

This speech was so sensible, and so self-denying a one, that the two others were immediately silenced, and did not even venture to open their mouths, but nodded to Jonquil to begin at once herself, which, to save time, she did at once.

"The next room to this is the morning-room," said she. "It is furnished in admirable taste—so simply and so completely, and so comfortably; but I am not going to speak to you of the lovely chintz covers, and curtains lined and caught back with the most beautiful—"

"You *are* speaking of them, Jonquil."

"What struck my attention at once," continued Jonquil eagerly, "were four armchairs exactly alike, and covered with the same chintz, facing the two windows; two chairs before each window, and by the side of each chair a most lovely work-stand and work-basket entirely alike, lined with delicate blue satin, and each one full of scissors, thimbles, tapes, cottons, and pins, and everything that is necessary for work!

"In another part of the room were four embroidery frames, with a piece of work in each ready to begin, and a complete store of many shaded wools and silks to work with!

"Further away in another corner were four spinning wheels, made of the most delicately inlaid ebony, and a great mass of unspun material attached to each one. There was very little other furniture in this room besides chairs and a large table, whereon were four baskets of plain work, pinafores and frocks for poor children, ready cut out, pieces of flannel, yards of calico, and odd lengths of pretty coloured prints.

"From the morning room I went into the library. Here of course were bookshelves and quantities of books; a square table, on which were four writing desks, four blotting-pads, four locked paper and envelope cases, and four little inkstands, and underneath which were four waste-paper baskets.

"From the library I went to the studio. There were four easels; four stands to hold colours, brushes and pencils; four Holland aprons hung on pegs, and four pairs of holland over-sleeves. The whole place seemed to me to be most beautifully yet most simply furnished; the one thing worthy of notice beyond all else is the fact that everything is in fours. Now what do you say to that?"

But neither of the other girls looked much astonished at Jonquil's account; they only smiled, and Buttercup, seizing her opportunity, instead of saying what she thought of what Jonquil had seen, told her what she had seen herself.

"It is just the same thing upstairs," said she, "except that in the drawing-room, of course, there are not four large pianos! but everything else is in fours. There are four large easy chairs and four footstools exactly alike, besides many others that are dissimilar; four fire-screens of stained glass; four three-legged tables with a fan and a scent-bottle, and a rose in a tiny vase, on each. The very cabinet has four compartments; one is filled with every description of nick-nacks, the other three are empty, save for a large white card, on which is written, '*To be* filled according to taste.' If I had a compartment to myself I should fill it with all kinds of rare shells. You, Daisy, would collect beetles and rare moths; and you, Jonquil, would have a little china, and one or two shells, and a great fat beetle or two.

"On the next flight (for I only went into the rooms of which the doors were ajar) were four bed-rooms all on the same landing, and all furnished in precisely the same manner. Each room had a pretty iron bedstead with chintz hangings and patchwork quilt. All the chair-covers and the curtains were precisely alike, and of the same colour. Pots of flowers stood on the window-sills, and there were the same number of pretty engravings on the walls, only the subjects were, of course, different. There were sets of book-shelves, too. Then each room had a large hanging

wardrobe, the doors of which were open, and showed a number of pretty but very simple dresses, all exactly like the dresses to be found in each of the other wardrobes; and there were wide open drawers, too, in each, filled with sweetly scented linen and dainty cuffs, gloves, and neckties. And there were sunshades, and hats, and hoods, and bows of all pretty colours. I must confess that I spent some time looking at these things; I do so like pretty things, and you do not, Jonquil, and I am forgetting to tell you about the china toilet, things which were quite white, with a pattern of rosebuds round the rims, and the dressing cases that were on the tables filled with brushes and combs and beautiful cut bottles for scent. I dare-say that there are plenty of houses just as beautifully furnished as this is, but I have never seen one like it, and I must confess that there being everything in fours, and all quite alike, is very puzzling."

"Let me speak," said Daisy, eagerly, "I will not be long, for my experience is just the same as yours. Out of doors everything is in fours also. The flower-beds are like any other flower beds, of course, but inside the summer house there were four garden seats, four sets of garden tools in the corners, four pairs of garden clogs and four large straw hats with flaps like umbrellas, hanging to hooks.

"There was only one orchard and one shrubbery,

of course, and one large piece of water with the little river flowing in at one end of it and flowing out at the other; and there was only one boat, a large safe one, you know, with poles for an awning, and four little flags, one at the top of each pole! there I found the mystic number again. From there I went back into the garden, and by a winding path to the stables. My dears! There I was welcomed by four small dogs, the most perfect of their kind, I feel sure—a pug dog, a black and tan terrier with a bright smile on his face—don't laugh—a real bright smile on his face—a lovely white Havannah with a most fascinating black nose, and a shaggy black dog of some sort, that waggled its tail nearly off its back. I crouched down on the ground and hugged them all in turns. Then there were four large dogs—a Mount St. Bernard, a Newfoundland, a Colley, and a Russian mastiff. They were chained up, but I patted all their different backs—I mean that I patted each of their backs, because they had only one back each, you know! and I scratched behind their ears, and then we were friends directly.

"After that I looked into the stable buildings, and what do you think I saw? I saw four lovely horses! I could have spent the whole day looking at them. They turned their pretty sleek heads round, and oked mildly at me with their great kind eyes, and n presently they came and rested their soft noses

on the wooden partition that separated us (for they were in loose boxes) and let me pat their faces; and, my dears, they must have been saddle horses, for I peeped next into the harness room, and there I saw four side-saddles!

"That's all I have seen, and I know what I think about it all. I have my own idea as to what it all means. I think I can guess! Can you?"

"Yes, I think I can," said Buttercup, promptly.

"It is very evident that either Lady Pazienza wishes to adopt us, or that she has four daughters. Is that your idea, Daisy?"

Daisy reflected awhile.

"No!" said she presently; "I hope it is not that. If she has daughters, why should she bring three strange girls to look at their different possessions in so mysterious a manner? And if it is Lady Pazienza who has taken a violent and sudden whim into her head, and carried it out so elaborately, then she is a dangerous person to be adopted by, for she might very likely one day take as sudden a whim in a different direction, and turn us adrift again. No! I think we must have more real claims on the owner of this house than any strange girls can have on a strange old lady. I think Jonquil you will be perhaps angry with me. —I think that Lady Pazienza is no other than——"

"Daisy!" cried Jonquil agitatedly, "you are right; and you, Buttercup—how could you see so

many things with your eyes only? Daisy has guessed and so have I; but at this minute I am doing still more than merely guessing—I am observing." Do you see that little china vase on the mantel-shelf? It has been put there since we went on our tour of inspection. What does it contain?"

"Wax flowers of course," said Buttercup; "because they are daisies, and there are no real daisies now of that sort."

"*Daisies!*" cried Daisy. "So they are! and in that vase on the sideboard what flowers are they?"

"*Buttercups!*" cried their amazed namesake.

"And in that vase on the side-table?"

"*Jonquils* to be sure!" cried both girls.

"And there?" said Jonquil, pointing to a little round table in quite a dark corner of the room, whereupon was a fourth vase exactly similar to the others, there was a sprig or two in it of a delicate green colour. The girls went quite close before they could see what it was.

"Mignonette!" cried they. At that moment the folding doors were opened.

"Come away—let us go!" cried Jonquil, passionately; "it is a disgraceful trap that she has laid for us."

Lady Pazienza advanced towards them. Within a few steps of the folding doors she stood, and though the room in which she was, was very dimly lighted, the blinds being all drawn down, they

could see how stately was her figure, how pretty her soft grey hair, and how her eyes sparkled. She was dressed entirely in black, and wore a black lace veil over her head, loosely tied under her chin. Her little hands rested on a crutch, but she did not lean on it as though she needed support, and when she spoke her voice was strangely at variance with her erect figure—her voice was weak and trembling.

"Who says that I have laid a trap for my guests?"

"I do!" cried Jonquil. "This house is Mignonette's, and you—you—why, perhaps you are Mignonette herself in disguise!"

"From any lips but yours," said Lady Pazienza, after a moment's pause, "I would not take those words so easily; but I take them from you, and when I have reminded you that you have broken bread in this house, you will hear me patiently, I know, even when I confess that it is Mignonette's house to which you have come—at last! As far as regards myself—think what you please! You may not have had patience to listen patiently to a young girl like yourselves—you will perhaps have patience to listen to an old woman. It is Lady Pazienza, remember, who speaks."

There was no answer. Lady Pazienza still stood in the dark, her hands clasped together, her voice still trembling, not indeed with any feigned emotion, as she spoke. And the three girls stood on the

other side of the doorway, close together with pale faces, and beating hearts, to listen.

"Girls," said Lady Pazienza, "I see that Mignonette's last attempt at peace-making has nearly—I will not say quite—failed! Let me plead for her.

"When, in my name, she asked you to this house, it was not, believe me, with the intention of parading before you her possessions! It was that each girl might see that a fourth part of them was hers!

"That she might be convinced that, in outward appearances, as in reality, each of the four girls would be as much mistress of the house as the others. If you are unconvinced still, it must be because you will not choose to be convinced, and Mignonette must always fail.

"Perhaps, however, it may be that you believe in her goodwill, but are not like other girls would be, and do not care for all the pretty things you have seen to-day. If that is really so, and your tastes are so simple, how much will Mignonette lose, if you will not be friends with her?

"You have seen what pleasures money can buy for you; forgive Mignonette for the semblance of bribery which the offer of them all among you, has; and let me speak to you of the duties that the possession of money entails.

"You have no right to put them from you.

"Are there no fatherless children? no sick people?

no widows? no hungry mouths, in your village? Are you too proud, or too indifferent, to stretch out your hand for the things that you might pass on to them, who need them so sorely? Is there so much joy in the world that you will lightly refuse the means of bringing joy to some who never may have known it? Is there nothing that you can do, being wise and generous already, had you but money to carry out your plans?"

"But why cannot Mignonette do this herself," interrupted Jonquil. "What does it matter if one gives away a certain sum, or if four divide and give it?"

"Because true charity does not mean money alone! Jonquil—you who do so many kindnesses, and have so little, must surely know that! True charity needs hearts to feel, eyes to see, and minds to judge where money should go!

"Just think how lonely Mignonette must be. Will you not be charitable to her?"

But there was no charity, just then, in Jonquil's heart.

"You will remember," said she, "that poor as we are, we are our own mistresses, and that the beautiful things you wish to give us would bring no pleasure with them if we had to pay for them with our liberty and the loss of our independence. We are able to do very little in the way of charity, but we will do always as much as we can. If you

require people to help you in your almsgiving, you can find them by paying for their time.

"You will remember, too, that we are weak inexperienced human beings. We do not pretend to be perfect, and we know very well that we may, in a month's time, have learnt to love the ease, the luxury, and the idleness of your life but only too well! We may chance to displease you from one moment to another, and we may be forced to part company, to go back to our present unpretentious home, and be dissatisfied for a lifetime!

"Leave us to ourselves, our occupations suffice us. You may have meant well, but you have taken an unfair advantage of us, and I, for one, wish to say good-bye for ever."

"Jonquil," said Lady Pazienza—for as she would not answer to the name of Mignonette, it would be indiscreet to give it to her—

"Jonquil, take care! You are not really proud, you are kind and sensible, but you have played at being proud for so long that it has become a habit—but a foolish habit, Jonquil. You, Buttercup, are practical enough, but not generous. I can see that you do not agree with all that Jonquil has said, but you will not side with Daisy, who would comfort poor Mignonette, if she dared! Let your heart follow hers; and you, Daisy, have more courage, and come to Mignonette, whose heart and arms have been waiting so long to welcome you!"

"Why! you are lecturing us already!" cried Jonquil.

"I am not asking you to do what Mignonette has not tried to do, herself; she can be very humble, I know, Jonquil."

"Good-bye," cried Jonquil; "you have been very cruel to tempt us."

"Jonquil!" cried Lady Pazienza, "just one word more—"

But Jonquil was gone.

"Buttercup," cried Lady Pazienza, eagerly, "fetch her back; perhaps I have said too much."

Buttercup followed Jonquil, but she did not come back.

Meanwhile, Daisy sobbed; her face buried in her hands.

"Daisy," said Lady Pazienza, very gently and tenderly, "stay with me."

"They are my sisters, Mignonette."

"True!" said Lady Pazienza; "good-bye, then. But first let me get your wraps, you would be cold without them."

She fetched them from the next room, and when she had given them into Daisy's arms, she turned away and left the room again without a word. It was of no use for Daisy to stand and cry, and explain to the tables and chairs, how torn in twain her spirit was with its conflicting emotions. So all she did was to follow

her sisters down the garden road as quickly as she could.

And thus agitatedly and yet tamely ended the visit to Lady Pazienza. It had been, as far as hostess and guests were concerned, a most lamentable failure.

Jonquil dragged her sisters into the road, and, figuratively, shook the dust of Mignonette's house off her own feet and theirs also. She was red with indignation; Buttercup was pale with emotion; and Daisy's face was not to be seen for puckers and running tears.

"Impertinent creature!" cried Jonquil, "I am in a regular rage!"

"But how are we to get home?" exclaimed Buttercup.

"Let us walk!" said Jonquil; "come along, it is not far!"

"It's fif—fif—fifteen miles," sobbed Daisy.

"I must say, Jonquil, anything so intemperate as your conduct I never saw. How is this child to walk fifteen miles home? What could possibly make you rush off in that rude manner?"

"Very well!" said Jonquil, passionately, "it's my fault, of course!"

"Of course it is! So perhaps you will suggest some way of our getting out of this difficulty?"

"Go back and apologise!" cried Jonquil, scornfully.

"No! you know we could not do that; but we could sit under this hedge and wait till the carriage comes, for I'm sure she will not abandon us!"

"Get into her carriage again?" cried Jonquil. "No, Buttercup! You, who are as sensitive as an old barn-door, and Daisy, who is the meanest-spirited little thing in the world, may do such things if you please. I cannot; and I intend to walk, if you do not!"

And off she started down the road at a most tremendous pace.

"She'll kill herself!" cried soft-hearted Daisy, stopping her sobs in order to look, horrified, at her sister's speedily retreating form.

"No she will not!" said Buttercup, seating herself calmly on the smoothest piece of ground she could find. "Sit down here, Daisy dear, on my dress, and don't cry like that!"

They were silent for awhile; but presently Buttercup went on—"Jonquil is the eldest, and she always speaks for us. But, Daisy, I don't think Mignonette has behaved so very badly—do you?"

"I think she has behaved nobly!" said Daisy with fervour.

"Well!" said Buttercup, a little doubtfully, "'nobly' is perhaps a rather large expression to make use of! But I do wish you would not cry so much, darling," continued her sister, with a

gentle kiss and caress; "let us say 'nobly' if you like it best."

They both smiled and sought each other's hand, and held it tightly clasped.

Presently there were wheels to be heard in the distance, and Daisy, who was the most fragile and the most tired, lifted her head hopefully.

"It is only a cart!" said Buttercup quickly, fearful of disappointment.

But it was, sure enough, Mignonette's great yellow chariot, and glad enough were they to see it and to get into it!

"If you please," said Buttercup, as she seated herself, "one of us is walking on in front. Will you be so good as to stop when you reach her?"

On rolled the carriage down the road, up a hill, round a corner; but no Jonquil was to be seen! She had indeed gone on quickly!

"Perhaps she has taken another road!"

"Is it possible she can have come so far as this?"

They had hardly got out the words when they saw her. She did not notice them, however, until they had almost passed her, and then the carriage drew up and two anxious faces looked through the window at her, and said—"Jonquil!" And then she stopped also, and made signs that she would join them.

Nothing was said at first. She leant her head against the carriage, and cried her stubbornness away, silently and wholesomely, and Buttercup undid the hook of her cloak, and Daisy said soothingly, "There darling! Put your feet up in my lap and rest the poor weary things!"

"I'm so sorry!" murmured Jonquil.

"Never mind!" said they, "we won't think about it any more."

But each one thought about it all the whole way home.

When they reached their stile it was already dusk —almost dark.

"Here we are," said Jonquil, stirring herself, "what a tale to tell Dilly!"

"I wonder she did not hear the wheels, and run out to meet us," said Buttercup.

"The windows are all shut!" remarked Daisy.

Meanwhile the carriage door had been opened, the heavy steps let down, and the girls ran quickly across the field to their house door.

"It is locked, Buttercup! Fancy our Dilly being so fearsome."

They rung the bell of course, but no one answered; so they rung again.

Nobody came, however; so while they rung for the third time, they called out loudly, in their fresh strong voices, "Dilly! Dilly!"

Again there was no answer.

"Why! where can she be?" "Gone out very likely!" "Perhaps asleep!"

So they rung again loudly enough to wake half-a-dozen slumbering Dillies, and called out "Dilly! Dilly!" till the very air seemed to echo "'Illy! 'Illy!" But there was no other answer.

It was most extraordinary. Why should Dilly be away just as she would be likely to expect them back? And why should both doors and windows be so tightly shut. It was certainly very mysterious.

"I hope she is not ill!"

"Or hurt in any way!"

"Something unusual must have happened!"

Just then one of the men-servants came up to them. He had been round to the back of the house, he said, "to see if he could see anything," and he had found the back door ajar. The young ladies could get in that way.

The fact was that he had slipped round unobserved by the three girls to the back of the house, and had himself unlocked the back door with the very key that Mignonette had taken away herself that very morning.

It will easily be imagined that in five minutes they had searched every corner of the house for the missing Dilly, and had not found her.

When they were quite sure that she was not there, asleep, or ailing, or in a fainting fit, but that she was simply away from the house, and evidently

false to her trust, their manner changed from one of great anxiety to one of great displeasure and disappointment.

"Thank you," said they to the man-servant, who had asked if he should remain with them; "We need not detain you, our servant is very likely gone to the village for something, and will be here shortly."

The man-servant said that they were going to bait the horses in the village, and would hurry the servant if they saw her.

The carriage then rolled away, and the girls went into their work-a-day sitting-room, to eat their supper of boiled bread and milk.

But they could neither eat nor rest. They were puzzled at Mignonette's behaviour, annoyed with each other, furious with Dilly, and generally disturbed and uncomfortable in their minds.

They waited patiently, however, until ten o'clock, and then anxiety once more took the place of annoyance.

"It cannot be mere negligent frivolity that keeps Dilly out so late," said Buttercup; "she is the last person to be so thoughtless and careless!"

"And she may have been walking in the garden somewhere and have slipped over a stone, and fallen! she may be lying somewhere outside with limbs broken and in agonies of pain, and not able to scream or move!" cried Daisy.

The picture she drew was too vivid not to rouse them. They found and lighted a lantern, and went round the garden and field and down into the willow copse with their shawls over their heads, their petticoats held in their trembling hands, and with cold white faces, and calling, "Dilly! Dilly!" at every step they took.

Certainly she was not to be found within a hundred yards or so of their house, and, as certainly, she must have had some very strong reasons for going beyond their ground, and for remaining away for so long.

"I shall run down to the village and see if they have seen anything of her there! Everybody will not be in bed yet—late as it is!" said Jonquil.

"I will go with you!" said Buttercup; "it is too late for you to go alone, Jonquil!"

"And leave me here?" said Daisy. "No, indeed! I will go too!"

"Then you must wrap up warmly, and if we are going we had better go at once," said Buttercup.

They went into their bed-room, and proceeded to look for warm comforters and stout shoes. Why! what's this?" cried Jonquil, as she took a pin from the pincushion.

It was a piece of folded paper lying on the pincushion.

She tore it open, and read it—the two others nearly looking over her shoulders.

There was not much to read, only these few words—

"When we meet again, it must be with mutual and above all abiding love and respect in our hearts. It is best that we should now separate for awhile. If you care for me as much as I care for you, you will soon find out who and where I am, and will call me back. If you do not, then good-bye for ever.

"DILLY."

"Dilly gone! Gone for good!" exclaimed Jonquil.

"It is impossible!" cried Buttercup.

"I don't believe it!—she is laughing!" said Daisy, with symptoms of fresh tears.

"Gone!" repeated Jonquil. "Why, what could have happened since we went out this morning?" That, however, was not easy to say. There was the letter, and there was not Dilly; beyond that they could know nothing, unless it pleased her to give them fresh news of herself at a future time.

"We were very good friends this morning!"

"You said nothing hasty? Try to recollect—did you, Jonquil?"

"No! nothing that I can remember," said Jonquil, humbly. "How could I be hasty with Dilly?"

"It would be indeed difficult! But what can have offended her?" said Daisy.

"Is it possible," said Buttercup, "that Migno-

nette, who seems to be a most persevering creature, could have anything to do with this? Do you think it is possible that Dilly was a servant of hers, put here to help us against our will—that she has now called her back?"

"That's it!" cried Jonquil, all aflame in a minute, and, as it were, on the look out for some fresh injury. "While Lady Pazienza was pretending to be away with her friend, she was meeting Dilly and putting her against us, and giving her orders, and settling our business for us, and fibbing, and robbing us of our dear little maid! It would be just like her; and that is what she has done!"

"Jonquil and Buttercup—you are both wrong! Shall I tell you who Dilly is, and what she has done?" cried Daisy, suddenly, her pretty eyes dilated, and her hands clasped; "shall I tell you?—and then we shall go and throw ourselves on our stupid knees and beg her pardon—she is the best, humblest, lovingest, noblest-hearted creature, in the world, and we are three geese! Shall I tell you what I think?—no, what I am quite positive of—our Dilly is Mignonette!"

"Oh!—no!—no!" cried Jonquil, as though Daisy had struck her.

"Dilly is Mignonette!"

"And you mean to say that she brushed our shoes, and made our beds, and cooked our

dinners, and swept our floors for eighteen months, Daisy? My dear, you are dreaming?" said Buttercup.

"Dilly is Mignonette," said Daisy.

"And you think she—she would wash our door-step and clean our sauce-pans, and call us 'Miss' for so long, and never—never get impatient?"

"Dilly is Mignonette," said Daisy.

"It is impossible!" continued Buttercup. "She ate her meals in the kitchen, and she went to the village to market for us, and we scolded her once, Daisy! I don't think there lives a person in the world who could be so humble and patient as that!"

"There is Mignonette. Dilly is Mignonette!" repeated Daisy.

Meanwhile, Jonquil had taken the little piece of paper close to the candle, and had examined it thoroughly.

"Buttercup!" said she, in a low voice, "Daisy is right. I know the handwriting now, though it is only in pencil. It is Mignonette's!"

Any persons sitting by chance on the very top-most branches of a certain group of lofty sombre poplar trees that grew somewhere mid-way between Mignonette's house and the three girls' cottage, would, undoubtedly, have had a fine view of the surrounding country, and something more. To the right they must have perceived at the bottom of the

hill, on the top of which they stood, a very elegant if somewhat old-fashioned open yellow carriage, the sole occupant of which seemed to be a very simply attired young country girl. A strong long sight might have enabled them to see that her eyes were red and swollen, but no amount of listening could have enabled them to hear what she was saying, for the reason that she was not saying anything at all, there being nobody there to say anything to; but if they could have guessed thoughts, they might have known that she was scolding herself.

"I have spoilt it all," thought she, sorrowfully. "I have been clumsy and pretentious, and my long term of self-trial will go for nothing. Dilly, or no Dilly, the girls will never believe in me, and it is all my own fault. Perhaps, who knows! they will not speak to me if even I tell them that I, myself, was Dilly; but if they do not, then they have really no hearts, and I shall never have any sisters!" and thereupon she wept afresh.

If the persons on the topmost branches of those tall poplar trees had now turned their glances leftwards they might probably have thought it strange that the three occupants of the little donkey cart that was coming toiling up the hill in an opposite direction should be engaged, all three, in the same occupation of shedding tears—two of them that is—and these with a difference.

They were hidden from view behind the high hedges that were on either side of the lane, and by the deep curve in the road; but, presently, when both vehicles had reached the top of the hill they must meet, and then what matter for observation there would be among the bird's-eye viewers on the trees, in the meeting of four girls all in tears! And for what?

One cried stormily, but every now and then she smiled too, and encouraged the others. The second wiped away a tear or so occasionally, but on the whole was sufficiently cheerful to bear the brunt of the conversation. The third girl was not crying, but she was very pale, and there was deeper sorrow in her face than tears could testify to.

"I can scarcely believe in such patience, and such wonderful self-control. I think we are going on a wild goose chase, that's what I think. How can one possibly believe in such generous self-sacrifice as hers would have been? Could you, Jonquil, or I myself, or even gentle Daisy—could any of us have so humbled ourselves for one week? Can we believe that Mignonette did it for nearly eighteen months?

"I am sure she did," said Daisy.

"And there is every proof that she did it, Buttercup," said Jonquil; "her handwriting is enough. It does seem incredible, and yet be sure that it is so! And I for one shall never respect

myself or any of us again, until we have said, 'Forgive us, we were wrong!'"

"After all, Jonquil!" cried her sister, "you are not so proud as you think! Darling, we will ask her pardon—and if she does not grant it—"



"If she does not grant it," said Jonquil, solemnly, "the fault will not be ours, and I can lift my head again."

"But she will grant it!" cried Daisy.

At that very moment, the two vehicles met round the corner as it were, and each stopped to rest the panting animals, and to give them breath.

There was a cry of course—four simultaneous

exclamations that sounded like one—and then there was an agitated eager scrambling into the road—and four young faces pressed together.

"I could not rest," cried Dilly, for Dilly it certainly was; "and I was coming to you, to say that if you won't have Mignonette, take Dilly back!"

"And we were coming to you," cried they, pressing round her, kissing her cheeks, her neck, her shawl, her two little hands, that once had been so white, and had grown red and rough in their service.

What more is there to say? Nothing—since their lives are yet to come—and may one day be written down, when a little portion of them has been spent.

She folded Daisy first in her arms, but between these two no words were needed. A smile and a kiss were enough.

Buttercup spoke frankly and humbly, and there was no lack of deep feeling in the tone or the words, when she said, "When I think what you have done for us, Mignonette, I can only say, 'Pity our humiliation, and forgive us!'"

"I lived your life for a time," said Mignonette, as she kissed her fondly, "that I might have the right now to say, 'Come and live mine!'"

Jonquil came last. Her lips trembled, and the words would not come. But Mignonette held her

to her heart with a fonder closer clasp than she had given to the others.

And so came sweet peace into each of the four hearts.



FAIRY WILD PANSY.

FAIRY WILD PANSY.

THIS delicate creature may have been so named by her fairy sisters, because when she flutters through the air, with her great purple wings spread, and her lovely yellow hair waving about her, she really does look like one.

It is a strange thing that so much should be known about her and her ways, and yet that one should meet with so few people who have ever seen her! For she very rarely shows herself at all to mortal eyes, and when she does, people take her for a purple butterfly, and say "how ridiculously like a pansy!" and run immediately to fetch their green gauze bags; but the green gauze bag that can imprison her is yet to be made.

Her likeness to a wild pansy, however, is not the only reason why she is so called.

It is she who pulls aside a little bit of the dark grey clouds on a long winter's day, so as to let us take a glimpse at the blue sky behind it; and in order that one or two rays of sun may come bravely struggling through the gap to us.

If the clouds do not take the hint and immediately roll themselves away, it is not her fault. She holds aside that little bit of dark grey cloud for us until her tiny arms can hold it aside no longer; and when she is obliged to drop it, she is quite as sorry as we are.

It is she, too, who rushes about to the different birds' nests, when there has been a thunderstorm, and they are still lying huddled together with fast beating hearts and ruffled feathers, and puts fresh courage and energy into them.

While the last big rain-drops are falling, and while the last growl of the thunder is being heard in the distance, Wild Pansy is on her way through the trees, crying out cheerfully—

"Come out, silly-billys! come out! Now is just the time to begin chirping again. Thunderstorms come, but they also go! It is merely a question of patience and due humility. Come out and chirp! Let us be lively again!"

And then the birds creep out of their nests, and hop on to the nearest twigs, and after they have shaken themselves a bit, and looked about them a bit they say to each other—

"Tweat, tweat! She's quite right. It's all over now. Tweat, tweat!"

She has little to do with very happy, joyous people. She knows that they do not need her. But let a tear spring into your eyes or a sigh flut-

ter from your lips, or a sad thought linger in your mind, and there she is beside you, trying with all her tiny might to help you. For she knows that you do surely need her!

It is she who comes to us when we are asleep and hovers over our pillow, and if our faces are calm and peaceful, she only smiles "good night" and flies off to some one else. But if we look troubled, and careworn, and there are red rims round our eyes, and perhaps a tear still wet on our eyelashes, she knows that there is work for her to do, and sits on our pillow, and whispers in our ear the names that are dearest to us, and speaks to us about the places where we most would like to be, and with her tiny hands she smoothes the lines on our foreheads, and wipes away that lingering tear with her own fairy locks; and presently all manner of happy peaceful thoughts flit through our brain, and we smile in our sleep.

Then she smiles too, for she knows that her work is done, and she is off again.

Sometimes when Mothers and Fathers are sitting side by side talking of very serious things, as older people must do, and heartful of anxiety and care, as older people must be, she sees how sadly they are looking, and knows how grave are their thoughts; and off she goes to the garden where the children are at play, and dashes into their very midst, and tickles the very youngest of them in his dear fat

little waist, so that he suddenly shouts with laughter, nobody can tell why! In fact, he can't tell why himself, but he laughs, nevertheless, so heartily that everybody laughs too, and they all troop indoors to tell the mother and father about it, and there are too many flushed faces all looking upwards, and too many dear little voices all talking at once, to allow of any more sad thoughts for the present.

When people are very troubled, too full of trouble to weep, when they have a load at their hearts, heavier it seems to them than they can bear for very long, it is Wild Pansy who tears off to the nearest wood, to look for a nightingale or a soft-throated linnet, and when she has found one, takes it back with her, shows it where it is to perch, and says, "Now sing, my dear; sing back the tears into those poor dry eyes."

And the bird sings; and presently the tears come in a torrent; and though the sorrow is still there, the stifling load at the heart is lightened and sleep may come.

It is she, too, who visits very young babies while they are sleeping in their cradles, and gently presses their little soft noses, this way and that way—down—straight on or up, and trains the eyebrows in the way they are to lie, and places the little fluffy tufts of hair on the smooth whitey-pink head in the direction on which they are to grow;

and persuades the rim of the eyes to take a round or an oval form, and moulds the shape of the little red lips by pressing and stroking and patting, so that the little new face may grow in the likeness of some old and well-known face that is absent. And all this she does so gently, that the baby never wakes, and so gradually and patiently day by day, that nobody guesses anything about it, and someone at last cries out one fine morning, "Oh! how like dear So-and-so the baby is growing!"

And after that the beloved face that is absent does not seem so far away.

These are some of the kindly pastimes of the little fairy who is called Wild Pansy, partly on account of purple wings and beautiful yellow hair, but principally because the other name for Pansy is—Heartsease!

DAME SWEETBRIAR.

DAME SWEETBRIAR.

"I WONDER if I dare!" said Dame Sweetbriar, to herself.

It was Christmas-eve, and the snow hung like a torn white curtain to the ivy-covered walls of Dame Sweetbriar's ruined castle. The snow that was on the ground was less broken; it lay where it fell, soft and crisp, save where a thin line of small human footsteps told of Dame Sweetbriar's thoughtful attention to the wants and comforts of her two goats in their shed, and the few fowls that were huddled together in the rafters over the goats' heads.

On the castle roof, too, the snow lay still more unbroken, and for that matter, inside the very castle itself, just underneath where the roof had fallen in, a hundred years ago, perhaps, in places which, since then, had been abandoned to, and inhabited by generation after generation of hooting blinking owls, and long winged dusky bats, and nests of squeaking scampering mice.

On the ground floor there was even yet a corner of the old ruined castle, that was in good order

enough to shelter the last solitary descendant of the great family that had once been very mighty people in the land, and lords of an important stronghold. Times had indeed changed since then, and now, nothing could have been more fragile or more picturesque than what remained of this, sometime, important stronghold, save its little lady, who was yet more fragile and picturesque than her dwelling place.

She was called Dame Sweetbriar, although she was but a very young creature, by the village people in the valley beneath the castle—Dame, a little on account of her noble descent, since her ancestors had once been owners of the whole village itself, but still more because of her gracious ways, and the strong will to help everybody, which was always hers, if the means were not—and Sweetbriar, because she lived their lives, shared their simple pleasures, and could understand their sorrows as if she were one of them, and was so strangely different to them, notwithstanding! Because she was like a sweetbriar bush set in a hedge of common privet; the eye sees nothing unusual, and the sweetbriar bush is unnoticed; but you have not gone three more steps before you stop and look round and cry, "Oh! how sweet that whiff was!"

And the memory of the Dame's pretty ways and words was as sweet as the unexpected scent of a sweetbriar bush.

"I wonder if I dare!" repeated Dame Sweetbriar, to herself, as she laid her hand hesitatingly on the old discoloured brass handles of a large chest of drawers, or press, as they might have been called in the days that saw them fashioned.

She was not wondering whether she dare open the drawer, for both drawer and contents were her own, and she very well knew what they were; she was only wondering if she dare so far fail in the respect due to her great-great-grandmother's memory as to cut, snip and alter a very magnificent dress and appurtenances that had once been hers, and that Sweetbriar had been accustomed to regard from her earliest infancy with feelings of great awe and veneration.

And yet, poor penniless Sweetbriar was in sad need of such pretty things as her clever little fingers could have made out of that faded finery! What wonder that she hesitated?

Presently she pulled the long drawer as far out as it would come with safety. There, in soft folds lay the rich flowered damask with its cream coloured ground and its lovely running patterns of faded flowers. There was the wonderful lace flounce that had once been as bright yellow as gold thread could make it, and was now as dull as long years could tarnish it. There, in their proper place, peeping from under the edge of the skirts were the tips of the two embroidered satin shoes and the

wonderful silk stockings, knitted and embroidered by hand.

Sweetbriar stood considering for some time with her round chin held between her finger and thumb. Of course a very pretty quilted petticoat for herself might be fashioned out of that voluminous skirt, and from the mere cuttings what innumerable dainty little bows and hoods and sweet scented hand-bags for New Year presents! Then there was, she knew, the long cumbrous cloak that lay folded beneath the dress, of a darker colour and a much smaller pattern. It was a rich earth brown, with a design of tiny leaves and rosebuds on it. Surely she might as well take that for her best winter over-dress instead of wearing a thick homely stuff, that after all she would have to pay something for, if not much, and which would look nothing when made! To say nothing of the wonderful waistcoats that she could make with the larger pieces that were left, and the quantities of lovely scraps for patchwork that there would be to delight the industrious young village girls with! Dame Sweetbriar's presents were never costly ones. She had but very little money, and it cost something, indeed, to satisfy her own, and her one maid, Bridgetta's, hungry young mouths; but what she had to spare she gave with good will, and for all the want of real value in her presents, they doubtless bestowed such fulness of pleasure on both giver and receiver

of them, as is not to be bestowed always by mere rich gifts lightly given!

Dame Sweetbriar hesitated no longer. Out she pulled all the old-fashioned finery from the drawer, and threw it in soft musk-smelling folds across her arm and over her shoulder, and downstairs she ran, down the jagged and uneven stone steps that went round and round in a kind of stone shaft or chimney, and were as narrow and winding as a corkscrew, along one or two dark stone-flagged passages and into her own room, smiling a little to herself, but well pleased, nevertheless, at her decision.

And yet—a little agitated too! For the things had lain there for many a long year before she was born herself. And since then the drawer had been but very seldom opened, and each time with great ceremony and reverence.

But Dame Sweetbriar, for all her romantic bringing up, and her dreamy thoughts and ways, was a bold spirit, too, and could act decidedly on occasions.

As she passed the passage that led to Bridgetta's kitchen, she heard her call—

"Dame! Dame! is that you?"

"Yes, here I am," answered Sweetbriar, pausing to listen.

"There is an old ragged beggar woman just come to the doorway. I have let her bide in the inner hall. Did I do wrong, Dame? And may I

take her a bowl of bread and milk, and a rug to cover her to-night if you will let her stay?"

"Surely you may," said Sweetbriar, readily. "You did quite right, dear Bridgetta! But please to roast some apples for us all. It is Christmas Eve, and we must make a little merry. I am very busy now, but I shall soon be ready for supper, too!"

The room in which Dame Sweetbriar principally lived, and into which she now carried her quaint burden, had a vaulted ceiling, and the walls were like the rest of the building, of massive stone, roughly plastered over with a plaster that had been once perhaps stone colour itself, but was now almost black. The windows were five in number, and were situated in five shadowy recesses. The furniture was scanty and unwieldy, and there was but one small candle on the table to give light to the vast cheerless place, but that candle flickered its very best and brightest, as befitted a thing that was to serve so bright and helpful a little creature as was the Dame herself. And the great crackling wood-fire did the rest. "Now, look here!" the flames seemed to say as they curled and wreathed and twined themselves round and round the two iron bars on which the logs rested, now leaping fitfully and capriciously half-way up the chimney, now gliding with new relish, as it were, over such portions of wood as were yet quite unburnt, and

then back again with a fizz and a shower of sparks to the unimpressionable iron bars—"Look here now! Candles are all very well, and useful things for a dark passage, perhaps. And so is the sight of a smiling face! But if you can mention anything that could send such a glorious, ruddy, comfortable glow over such a melancholy looking apartment as this is, as we are doing now at this very minute, then all we can say is, mention it."

Dame Sweetbriar spread her treasures carefully out on the table, turning them over with gentle touch and somewhat bated breath. How close and neat the sewing was! How strange—how pitifully strange to think that that little strand of thread should still hold edge and edge together; while the hands that placed it there, and were so much more wonderful in their time, should have lived so short a day, and had so long since loosened *their* hold upon all earthly things!

She scarcely liked to sever stitches that had been so brave and so enduring! She would rather leave them unmolested in the tiny holes they had filled for so long a space of time, and just cut her silk along, an inch away from them. This decision lightened her of half the feeling of wilful desecration that had come to her as she examined and looked and wondered. Not one single tiny hook or eye-let hole should be disturbed. Surely that was a crumb! Faint remnant of a loaf of by-

gone days! It might have been a piece of wood or a little brittle stone. Only, how, if it were not a crumb, should it be found in the gathers of the skirt, where crumbs so often are? And why should it not be a crumb?

Presently, there was a new surprise that sent the blood rushing to her face. Her exploring fingers had slid into a pocket! There they stayed for at least a quarter of a minute, too curious to come out again, too timidly reverent to dive further down at once.

Curiosity of course gained the day very naturally, and down went Sweetbriar's hand.

"Why, what's this?" exclaimed she, as she drew it out quickly again with something held between her finger tips.

It was only a piece of paper yellow with age, and folded in eight creases that were almost cuts. This was still more absorbingly interesting than the dress! She unfolded the little paper, hurriedly, yet very carefully, and spread it open before her on the further end of the table, and put her light close to it. But alas! though the paper was covered with small fine writing, it was unintelligible to her, being in a foreign language that she could not understand.

This was a terrible disappointment to her, the more so, that some of the words seemed so strangely familiar, and much like some that she

had seen on the old tombstones in the village churchyard. Long and earnestly did Sweetbriar pore over the puzzling interesting fragment that had been so many years in its hiding place, so patiently biding its time! Wondering to herself whether it was dazzled by its return to the long-forgotten light of day! Or whether it was stunned and dazed by the wonderful change that had taken place in everything since first it was put away in that pocket! Whether it was written in this very room, and recognised the old walls and was glad to see them again! Whether the tiny brown letters were glad to show themselves once more, before the ink that they were made of faded quite away, and left but one or two faint light yellow marks to tell of that which once had been a thing with meaning in it—a thing that spoke to eyes as voices do to ears; or whether they could only look back to olden times with vainest yearning and regret, and care for nothing in the present. Certainly the young dame was of a most reflective nature!

Closer and closer she bent her head over the little page, and strove earnestly to decipher what she did not understand when she had deciphered it. Closer and closer still, until her soft hair fell over the table, and her flushed cheek almost rested on the creased little document, that smelt so strangely and was so puzzling.

"Sweetbriar!" said a voice; and Sweetbriar

lifted her head, not, perhaps, so very much amazed as she might have been at the summons.

There, upon the edge of the table where she had left her heap of old finery, sat a little old lady, dressed in the very things themselves! There was the cream coloured damask robe with the running pattern of faded bunches of flowers on it—there was the tarnished golden-thread flounce at the edge of it. Round her shoulders hung the dark damask cloak, and on her dangling feet were the hand-knitted embroidered silk stockings and the embroidered satin shoes. As for her face, it was the kindliest, brightest, sweetest face that could possibly be seen, and Sweetbriar felt as if it would be foolish indeed to be afraid of her strange visitor, and was, on the contrary, quite glad to see her sitting there so composedly. She only felt a little puzzled to think why she should be there—which was natural.

"Do not be surprised," said the little old lady; "you are doubtless aware that fairies can take any shape they please, and it pleases me just now to assume the form of your lamented great-great-grandmother. You will also permit me to appear in her clothes; for we fairies are, after all, but very ethereal creatures, with no visible or tangible body to speak of, and we are obliged, when we wish to appear before mortals, to assume the outward appearance and the clothes of somebody else.

"Now, what I am come about here this evening is this:—I have long seen with pleasure your humble efforts at Christmas time to give pleasure to others; I have come, therefore, to do you a Christmas kindness: I will translate that piece of paper for you, or rather I will arrange the letters so that you can read it for yourself. How will that do?"

"Oh!" cried Sweetbriar, with clasped hands. "How good you are, Madam!"

The fairy smiled, and gave the open paper a little tap with her fingers.

"Make haste, my dears!" said she.

Good gracious! "Making haste" is scarcely the expression to use in describing the scramble that ensued. There were all the little crooked letters starting from their places and scampering over the yellow paper in all directions, like a pack of schoolboys let loose!

Big "H's" knocking down small "g's"; capital "S's" tumbling over "P's," only to come in collision further on with capital "R's; hurried "commas" tripping up "semicolons," and "full stops" coming to full stops just where they were not wanted; "l's" running foul of "w's," and big "B's" jostling small "o's"; a large "M" making frantic signs to three or four half-dazed innocent looking "y's" to take, one of them at least, a place beside her; and a big "G" en-

deavouring to push away a timid "n" who stuck obstinately on the left of her.

"Come—come!" said the fairy, "nG wont do at all. Try further down, my dear. The fifth word of the third line wants a letter. There you are! Now, Sweetbriar, is this easier for you to read?"

Sweetbriar looked. The little letters were all in their places as still as mice, and the language in which they had arranged themselves was her own; so she read—

"My dear great-great-grand-daughter. The fairy who will translate this for you has just been with me, and has left me a present to offer to you. How much I envy her the power of gazing upon you, my dear—and yet unborn descendant,—words written with a pen can never tell, child of my child's child's child! If you must be surprised at what I write and at this fairy-gift, let not your wonderment, at least, hinder your contentment.

"'Tis soundest wisdom throughout life to accept the brain that has been given you, and be content with such amount of understanding as it doth contain.

"A pint pot will not hold a quart of liquid. Let gently over the brim of your understanding's measure such matter as it is not fashioned to receive, and rest in peace.

"The gift I have to leave you with my deep



"SWEETBRIAR, THE WISH IS YOURS."

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blessings, and the prayer that you may use the gift aright, is the power of wishing one wish. I am your loving Ancestress."

Sweetbriar was much touched with this letter, and the fairy too was silent for a moment. Presently she spoke.

"Sweetbriar," said she, "the wish is yours. It was given to your great-great-grandmother, and she left it for you. I have no control over it, and you may wish when, how, and what you please.

"Perhaps, however, you may see fit to indulge an old woman, who has seen something of this world's joys and cares, by listening patiently to a few words of friendly caution?"

Sweetbriar only smiled. But there were tears, too, in her eyes, and the old fairy, well pleased with this silent answer, spoke in a clear sweet voice as follows:—

"Recollect that if you wish for riches, you may, perhaps, live to remember, with bitter regret, that there are some blessings that money cannot buy, and that your wish might have given you!

"Nor should you wish for power and dominion. You would assuredly live to know how limited the very greatest of all earthly power is, when the whole world might be bowed down before you in awe of your very glance, and you be powerless to grant yourself the one secret desire of your heart!

"Do not wish for health, since by cleanliness and

sobriety you will easily be enabled to preserve the good health you now enjoy. Do not wish for happiness perpetual, since, in the first place, your happiness will greatly depend upon yourself, and, in the second, if you never know care or sorrow yourself, you may run a grave risk of becoming indifferent to the care and sorrow of others.

"Nor should you ask for a long life, lest you pay for your presumption in growing weary of your days long before they are all counted.

"And do not wish to be much loved, since that is the only wish that cannot be granted. Love is Master, and yields to no coercion. You will be loved, little dame, as you love others; and if their measure be not so great as yours, theirs will be the loss!

"Do not either wish hastily or at random, and, above all, do not wish at all, just yet. Remember that your wishes of to-morrow will not be as your wishes of to-day; and there is but one wish and many morrows!"

"But," cried Dame Sweetbriar, in dismay, "you have left me nothing to wish for!"

The fairy smiled.

"Dear child, how much! You have so good a heart that I tremble for you to think how easily it may lead you to wish uselessly and foolishly. The very first little baby you come across with a swollen finger tied up in a rag, and the tears streaming

down its face, will make you want to wish the finger well again!

"But you must recollect that a soft hot bread poultice is a fine thing for a swollen finger, and a good game of romps a capital remedy for the dol-drum dumps, and you will not thus waste your gift on such trifles.

"One thing more. Do not speak of this fairy gift to anyone: it would break the spell, and you might not obtain what you ask for. When you wish, do it this way: count a hundred backwards, aloud, then name your wish aloud; for this way you will run no risk of wishing with your lips without the full consent of your reason or your heart. And now farewell."

As the old lady said that she slipped from the table, gave the little yellow paper one tap and Sweetbriar another.

"This is the way fairies take their leave," said she, and with that she grew larger and larger still, until the whole of the room seemed filled with cream-coloured and flower-embroidered damask. "Farewell!" said she, nodding kindly, when her head had reached the ceiling, and must assuredly go straight through it if she grew any taller.

There was a flash of blinding light, and a noise that sounded like the clanging to of a brass door. Sweetbriar, much awed, fell on her knees, and hid her face in her hands. The whole room

whirled madly round and round, and she lost consciousness.

When she came to herself, she was lying on the cold soft snow just underneath one of her own wide open windows, and Bridgetta, her little maid, was kneeling by her side, sobbing bitterly.

"Thank heaven, Dame, that I have found you at last! It has been such a weary search; but if you are safe, I care for nothing else!"

"Where is she?" murmured Sweetbriar.

"Gone! the deceiving creature! No beggar-woman, Dame, but a thief, or a wicked fairy! She dashed past me as I was taking the bread and milk to the inner hall, and tipped it up in my face! 'Take that for staring at your betters, girl!' said she; and, of course, I was staring, because—if you'll believe me, Dame—you couldn't see her rags for the beautiful silk cloaks she had about her. But you are faint, dear little mistress; what did she do to you?"

"I don't know—it feels cold—where am I, Bridgetta?"

"Here in the snow! The wicked thing must have pushed you out of the window!"

"Hush!" said Sweetbriar, reverently, "She was a fairy—really a fairy!"

"A bad one then!—My goodness! I'll run and [illegible]e-shoe—shall I?"

Dame, when she found her feet and her

senses again, said "No! The clothes had come out of her wonderful drawer upstairs, and she had herself lent them to the fairy, who was welcome to them—besides, she had done her no harm!"

"No harm!" cried Bridgetta; "then what do you call pitching one out of window, and making off with one's clothes, pray, Dame?"

"It was her way. She meant it all in kindness, Bridgetta!"

"It's a sort of kindness I don't understand then, Dame!"

"Nor I!" said Sweetbriar, softly. What was she to say to Bridgetta, since she might not tell her of the wonderful gift. Presently she added—

"A pint pot you know, dear Bridgetta, will not hold a quart of liquid! Do we, therefore, let gently over the brim of our understanding's measure such matters as they are not fashioned to receive, and rest in peace!"

There was something in Dame Sweetbriar's reverent tone of voice, as she said this, that silenced Bridgetta's ready laugh and sharp retort.

When they reached Sweetbriar's room, they found that not only were the clothes gone, but the little bit of yellow paper too; and that grieved Sweetbriar the most.

Two years passed away; and, partly in deference to what she believed to be a fairy's desire, and partly because she was of too con-

tented a nature to crave very greatly for other blessings than those which were already hers, Sweetbriar had not yet named a wish aloud.

Deep in her heart, however, she cherished the hope that one day, when she was older and wiser, she might with safety wish for boundless wealth; yet this was not because of her frivolous love of pretty new things, but because of tender love for old ones!

There was not a jagged stone in the whole ruined castle that did not cry out to her day after day, "Replace us! We have done our work, and fain would be at rest! We no longer cling together bravely as we used, defying winter's storm, and summer's rain! Our strength is gone, and our courage is waning! The kind green ivy does its best, and we are grateful for its help! But we know that even to the endurance of a stone there must be an ending and a resting time! We want to lie idle in some green spot, where the grass will grow to our sides, and the soft moss cover us, and the little wondering beetles crowd around us, while we tell them tales of things that were a thousand years ago! Do replace us, little, fresh, young Sweetbriar!"

There was not an old creaking rafter, or a plank of wood, that did not seem to say to Sweetbriar—

"Do you know, Dame Sweetbriar, what the wind says to us, when it comes whistling round us in and

out of the cracks and crevices? This is what it says —'What! still here, old planks!' And we answer with a creak, 'Yes! still here!' But where are those stout leathern boots, with the clinking spurs, that strode so boldly up and down us, half hidden and half silenced by the folds and rustle of the silken skirts that swept beside them?

"Where are the long lithe greyhounds, lying full length before the fire, and blinking at each crackle of the burning wood?

"Where, too, the little curly lap-dogs, with their paws on the edge of my lady's robe, and their noses resting on the tips of her dainty feet?

"Where is the pretty little page, in his blue doublet, with his tinkling lute?

"And why is the old ebony spinning-wheel so silent?

"You cannot give us all these loved old friends, Dame Sweetbriar. Their day is past, and ours is passing; but you can have us carried to some sweet-smelling field and let us rest among the things that are Heaven's own, and come back faithfully the same, and still the same for countless springs! We want to lie amongst the primroses——"

But in thinking of her own ruined castle, Sweetbriar did not forget the far more urgent wants of her village friends. That indeed would be her duty and her first consideration; the other was her

pleasure and her dream! What wonder then that she shut her heart against the fairy's warnings, and made her mind quite up to wait a little while longer, till she was wise, and boldly then wish for great riches!

And what wonder that she startled placid, dreamless Bridgetta with such exclamations as—

"Oh! surely—surely I may wish for great riches, Bridgetta!"

And Bridgetta, not knowing, of course, of the gift she had in store, would laugh her loudest, "Oh! yes, Dame; nothing hinders you from wishing!"

In fact she startled a good many people unwittingly in this manner; and they said among themselves that it was a pity the poor little lady lived so much alone, and grew so strange in thought and speech at times.

One day, when she met an old man from the village, who had known her from a baby, but had not seen her lately, and he shaded his eyes with his hand to see her clearer, and said, smiling—

"Why! it's no longer the little Dame Sweetbriar—it's very nearly a grown woman, as tall as—very nearly as tall as——"

"Only very nearly!" interrupted Sweetbriar, in dismay. "Oh! do tell me when do you think I shall be tall enough, and old and wise enough, to—to—to wish for the right things?"

"Deary me!" said he—"Deary me, Dame! you ask more than I can answer, that you do!" And with that he nodded and smiled and shook his head pleasantly at her, and went on his way as quickly as he could, in order to avoid further troublous conversation.

But for all this, and other similar little checks, Sweetbriar resolved to wish for riches very shortly.

"I have quite made up my mind about that!" she said to herself. "I understand why the fairy should not wish me to have riches while I was young and foolish. But I feel that I am growing wiser every day. Every hour I live, I seem to know more and more about things. I should not, of course, have known what to do with large sums of money long ago, but now I shall know very well; and nothing can surely be so useful in this world as money, if one spends it properly, and if one does one's duty; and, of course, I am going to do my duty——" There, though she was perfectly alone, she flushed crimson to the roots of her hair, and covered her face with her hands.—"I hope I am not growing presumptuous! I must not let myself become too confident," thought she. But, alas! she was that already, and she scarcely knew it!

By and by the winter king came again and spread his white carpets over the whole land, and hung his glittering jewels on the boughs of the trees, and set his looking-glasses in all the little ponds and

rivulets. And when that was done, he gave a great ball to the north wind and his family, and invited a large company of snowflakes to be present. And if you have never been invited to a great dance of snowflakes, you should take the first opportunity that offers of attending one; for they are the wildest, maddest, whirlingest, most inexhaustible dancers in the world!

But though they can dance, they don't know anything much else, and are content to fall more or less zig-zagilly from their places in the sky to their places upon earth. And they haven't the least notion of what the rest of the world is doing. But the winds come from everywhere, and go everywhere, and know everything, and they are for ever recounting to each other and to the trees the wonderful things they have seen. One may hear them whispering on a lovely summer's night. It is generally a pretty story that they are telling then; and the trees understand it all, and nod pleasantly together in the moonlight, as if to say, "Go on! What a charming story this is! Tell us what happened next!"

But human beings, who don't understand what it is all about, merely think "What a soothing sound it is!" or, "What a hateful noise is that!" according to the different views they take of it all.

But all the stories that the winds tell are not rful and pleasant; and this is what they said

to the whole of the village people one fine morning, and to Dame Sweetbriar in her well-beloved ruined castle:—

"Beware! Beware! Beware! Cloudheart is coming! We know it, for we have passed by him and his army of fierce men on our road hither from the north and from the east.

"We could not think what was the reason that we saw so few smiling faces in the villages as we swept through them. We could not tell why there should be so little corn in the fields, and so few beasts in the meadows. We found everything so sad and desolate, that we were saddened ourselves, and crept through the valleys as quietly as we could, wondering as we went at the trodden down fields, the broken down hedges, the empty cottages, and the weeping eyes. But when we swept from between the tall hills, out of the sheltered hollow and across the open plain, and saw far ahead of us the glittering spears and armour of Cloudheart and his men, we wondered no more, but dashed in amongst them with a will. We made their helmets unsteady on their heads, we can assure you; we clanked their swords the one against the other; we jingled their spear heads together, and rattled the steel links of their coats of mail for them. We blew the horses' manes into their own eyes, and made them kick and rear. But, alas! that's all the mischief we could do to them at present; and so we have rushed

onwards to warn you, so that the fate of the other little villages may not be yours also.

"And we can tell you that Cloudheart is not far off. He is just behind the farthest hill of all. Hide your treasures. Decide what you are going to do. If you resist, you will be over-mastered. If you do not resist, you will lose everything that is yours. Poor—poor little village. Poor little helpless Dame. Beware! Cloudheart is coming. We know it, because we have seen him."

And the winds rushed on their way, shrieking loudly, "Beware! Beware! Cloudheart is not far off!"

But all that the villagers said to this was, "Bless us all! How the wind does howl!"

By and by the winds tried again.

"Cloudheart is here," they cried, as they hurried through the village with a whirl and a skurl. "Cloudheart and his men are camping on the other side of the moorland. We passed a soldier on horseback as we swept across it. He was cheering on his horse, 'Come—come—Whirlwind,' cried he, 'step out boldly, old beauty, and let them see how fast we can run!' But we laughed as we tore past them, and left them to their vaingloriousness. Nevertheless they will soon be here. Cloudheart is their master."

The winds, however, north, south, west, or east, might shriek themselves hoarse. No one thought

or knew anything about the matter until that soldier actually dashed his way into the astonished village. He did not, however, draw rein there, but only shouted out to ask his way to the Castle, and being told, tore at full speed up the hill to it, and did not stop until he reached the principal door of it. There he did draw rein, and having looked about



him for a moment, and having then indulged in a roar of laughter that shook him in his saddle, drew a little horn from his back, and blew three loud blasts, which was to summon the governors of the Castle to appear.

Whereupon Dame Sweetbriar and Bridgetta rushed out into the open air with their eyes wide

open, and their teeth chattering, and wanted to know his pleasure.

The soldier treated the whole affair as a capital joke: the ruined castle, the two timid girls, even the peaceful little village in the hollow. He gave another roar of laughter, which proved the excellence of his lungs, and, said he—"Why! what have you done with your guards? Where are your men in armour, eh? Is n't there such a thing as a sentinel about here? It 's a mere matter of form, of course, but one must be particular! You are two very nice little girls; but just now you won't do at all! Where is the governor of this castle?"

Dame Sweetbriar took one step forward, and Bridgetta, fell, on the contrary, one step backward.

"Here!" said Dame Sweetbriar.

The soldier was about to indulge in a third roar of laughter; but there was something in the attitude and manner of both Sweetbriar and her maiden that warned him to be careful; so instead of laughing he drew his sword, saluted, sheathed his sword again, and looked extremely puzzled.

"I have no sentinels or guards of any kind; there are no men here at all. There is no one here but myself and this young girl, who keeps me company. The castle is, however, mine; and now, sir, that you know who I am, who are you? You must

have the goodness to dispense with forms, for I should not understand them."

"I come from the great Cloudheart, and I summon you to surrender to him your castle, domain, and self, within the space of five days!"

At the mere mention of that dreaded name, Sweetbriar's blood ran cold within her veins, and she became deadly pale. For all that, she was too true a descendant of a long race of valiant men and women to betray any signs of fear.

"You speak at your ease," said she, slowly and emphatically—after a moment's agitated pause, full of hurried thought; "tell Cloudheart what you have seen: a ruined castle, guarded by two young girls, a defenceless village, peopled with the poorest of the poor! But tell him also that he had best beware how he venture to offend the dignity of the one or molest the peaceful security of the other!"

The soldier was silenced. There was no mistaking the tone of authority and confidence in which this pale fragile-limbed lady spoke. He was both puzzled and silenced. So all he did was to throw down his mailed glove as gently as he could at Sweetbriar's feet, merely, as he remarked, as a matter of form, which she as quietly and gently stooped to the ground and picked up.

Whereupon the soldier blew three more loud blasts upon his horn, again drew his sword, saluted

the governor of the castle, who courteously acknowledged his obeisance, returned the sword to the sheath, wheeled round his horse and galloped off.

He did not, however, go very far. Some hundred yards or so away, he once more reined in his horse and leapt from the saddle; then patting the creature's pretty brown head, with a whispered caressing word or two, he left him, well knowing that he would not stir from the spot until he returned, and ran back himself to the castle.

Bridgetta had flung herself down on a large snow-covered stone, and was crying bitterly; but there was a rapt far-away look in Sweetbriar's eyes, who stood silently by her side, that scarcely told of fear, or indeed of trouble at all, and though she must have seen the man coming, she did not notice his reappearance in any way, by word or look, until he spoke.

"Dear lady," said he, "just now I was a herald from Cloudheart, mounted on Cloudheart's horse. Now I am only a man, carried by my own feet. Do you know where Cloudheart is? Only a few short miles away across yonder moorland. Do you know how strong he is? or how many we are? You poor little thing, do you fancy that you can stand against Cloudheart?

"Listen to me. Pack up all your little treasures, and run away as fast as you can, Southwards—Southwards, you understand,—because we have no

men that way, and the road would be clear. Then when we are gone, and everything is quiet, you can come back again.

"Now most people would call me a traitor for this; but I can read faces, and I know you will not betray me—will you, little lady?"

"No, indeed!" said Sweetbriar, earnestly; "I will remember you and your goodness whenever I call to mind your master's wickedness. If you please, I will clasp your hand once in mine, as I say, 'Thank you!'"

The soldier smiled. "Now really, little lady, Cloudheart is not so black as he is painted. When the fight is coming on, he is a very cruel demon, but after it's all over, he would be glad to think I had warned you. These hands of ours are not good pairs, are they? Mercy on us! what a paw for a longsword! You do me great honour. But, I do wish you would send another message to Cloudheart—a different one."

"I will!" said Sweetbriar, rather suddenly, and, for her, fiercely.

"Tell him that I, Dame Sweetbriar, give him five days to retire from his encampment."

Both Bridgetta and the soldier looked at each other in amazement. Surely this young creature's brain was wandering.

"Dame!"—whispered the former, agitatedly—"you will ruin us all."

"Oh, no!" said Sweetbriar, calmly; "these are matters you cannot understand, dear Bridgetta. I have means, thank Heaven, wherewith to subdue this wicked tyrant. You will give my message, Sir?"

"Why," said he, "I must! But it is just the very message that will make him boil over with rage, and cannot possibly do you any good!"

"Be it so!" said Sweetbriar, firmly. "If Cloudheart is not gone in five days, he may regret it bitterly."

There was no answer to be made to this. Cloudheart's well-meaning messenger sighed heavily.

"Here," said he, "are some of those thorns that lie beneath the laurel leaves, and give such cruel pricks! Little girl!—I mean dear lady—can you read in the skies? If you can, look up now. There will be such a fall of snow 'ere night, as has not perhaps been seen for many a long year past! We men can cut a way for ourselves, through solid mountains, and a little snow-heap, more or less, won't hinder us from coming here! But the south road lies in a valley. What could your four little hands do towards making a way for you through the snow that will gather there? Do not wait until you are shut in here, and can't escape if you would! Now is your time, believe me. Go at once—you will be wise girls."

"Thank you again, heartily," said Sweetbriar;

"I cannot abandon my friends. But I should be happy to think that Bridgetta were safe."

"Dame!" cried Bridgetta, warmly, "you are a sweet creature, and as obstinate as a mule. But if you like to be killed, so do I. If we die together, it will be safety enough for me!"

"I call that speaking, not foolish cackling! That's something like! Can't you persuade her?" said the soldier.

"Not I! She will not listen to me, if she does not listen to herself—herself being generally right!"

"I am right now!" said Sweetbriar, cheerily.

"Farewell, then!" said the kindly messenger, with another heavy sigh, for his heart was the heart of a cooing dove, and strangely at variance with its martial envelope and surroundings.

When he had left them, he galloped back into the village and made his proclamation—or rather called upon the villagers to surrender to Cloudheart within five days, and warned them of the dire consequences of any foolish attempt at resistance; and this he did in two places, before the church doors, and again in the middle of the market place.

Here in the village, things did not pass so amicably as they had done at the castle. A good many angry thumps were given and received. The soldier was one man against a score or more belligerent ones; (for many that had heard fast

enough refrained from such fierce comment as blows, knowing well how useless it all was).

But the soldier was mounted on a very sprightly horse, whose hoofs were busy during the fray, and were no slight protection. The hilt of his sword was another, so that, for all the score or so of arms against him, he was not in any way getting the worst of it.

"Why!"—thwack—"you must be perfect savages"—thwack, thwack—"not to know"—thwack—"that one does not set upon a"—thwack, thwack—"a herald like this!" There was a perfect shower of thwacks at this remark.

"Oh! yes, yes!" said they; "your wonderful master would like to swallow us all at a mouthful without even having an indigestion after us!"—thwack, thwack, and thwack.—"But if we are to be eaten alive, he shall at least suffer for it!" Here was another shower of thwacks, one of which, from an iron bar, bestowed by the blacksmith, fell heavily on the horse's head.

The poor beast staggered wildly for a moment and then fell to the earth a dead weight, with his master half under him.

Now these people were not the savages he thought them. A fallen enemy was a sacred thing in their estimation, and this enemy, crushed and unconscious, was borne away to the nearest house with tender hands, and nursed as carefully as

though he had been a friend. But he did not open his eyes for some time, and then he looked vaguely about him, said, "Run away, dear little girls, run away!" and shut them fast again.

The market-place now was like a fair, but, alas! not a merry one; people were running to and fro with anxious faces and eager questions, surmising, arguing, and suggesting all in a breath; some were pale and agitated, others red and angry, according to their natures; some were terrified out of all desire for resistance; others were so eager to fight that they forgot their fears; some were confident, some bumptious, which is different; some were incredulous. As for the wives and mothers, some talked without crying, some cried without talking; some were already packing up their valuables; some were helplessly wringing their hands; and a few were so calm, so thoughtful, and so helpful, that the mere clasp of their steady hand was a cordial to the faint-hearted.

As for the children, they stroked the mane of the horse, and wondered at his sleek skin and at the quiet hoofs, though they did not yet venture to approach within a couple of yards of them, and were uproariously delighted when the cry went round—

"The Dame—the Dame is here!"

"Oh! now for sweetmeats then!" they cried in delight, and crowded round her, holding out their hands.

Sweetbriar had run down to the village as fast as her trembling legs could carry her, and when she first came into the market-place from out of the little narrow lane that led to the castle road, there was a cry of joy and welcome, and everybody pressed round her, wondering not a little at her altered looks.

She seemed indeed as one under the influence of a dream. Although the snow had begun to fall, and it was bitterly cold, she had no covering on her head, and her beautiful long hair lay in heavy waving masses down her back. The cloak that Bridgetta had so vainly tried to keep on her young mistress's shoulder as she had struggled after her all the way from the castle had fallen to her waist, and she now kept it about her with one white hand, as if she knew she surely must be cold, but did not feel it.

Nor indeed did she look it; for her eyes were brilliant, and her cheeks were flushed, and her voice was clear and untroubled as she called out hurriedly and yet brightly—"I know all! I know all! but do not be afraid. I am certain I can help you. Trust all of you to me!"

Some believed her implicitly. How she was to do it they knew not. But she never broke her word, or promised things she could not do. So it was all right.

Others drew back, smiling tenderly and sadly

enough, and thinking that the dear lamb's wits were clean gone out of her with the fright.

Hope, however, is a very vigorous plant. It will take root and flourish almost anywhere and anyhow; and it spreads as quickly as a root of mint.

Sweetbriar's confidence soon made the most of her ignorant hearers confident also.

"I don't quite know what I am going to do," said she, addressing the crowd eagerly and earnestly—"I have made no plan as yet; but though I may not tell you why I myself do not so very greatly fear Cloudheart, I may tell you that he will not be able to hurt us if I will it otherwise. Perhaps this you will not understand," continued she; "but it is not necessary, or, indeed, possible, that you should. My heart is full of your troubles! I love you all very dearly—you will trust to me?"

"Dame!" whispered Bridgetta, pulling at her cloak, "Dame, my sweetest! you are beside yourself."

But Sweetbriar heard nothing, and saw none of the pained looks that passed between some of the older and wiser of the village folks.

The deep love and reverence, however, that their forefathers had had for her's, prevented them from showing any sign of distrust; and as by far the larger portion of the crowd were too simple and ignorant not to feel the comforting influence of

such marked and cheerful confidence in her own powers, as was Sweetbriar's, they very soon dispersed, and left Sweetbriar to her own great thoughts and plans for their safety.

She had waved the last lingerers away from her, and one by one they had obeyed her evident wish to be alone, and left her standing by the market-place fountain, lost, indeed, in thought.

Cloudheart or no Cloudheart, this was scarcely the spot to linger about in on a cold winter day; and what forebodings and lamentations there were to be got through that morning, might just as well be got through somewhere else, where, for instance, there was a log or two of burning wood, and other trifling matters, to make things bearable, for the moment at least. "For, mind you," said they, "a deal may happen in five days, that is not dreamt of now."

Bridgetta was of a like opinion. So presently, after a minute's hesitation, and a shiver or two, she touched Sweetbriar's arm gently—

"Dame," said she, "it snows!"

But Sweetbriar merely glanced at the little fluffy white balls that were whirling on every side of her, and not at Bridgetta's white tearful face.

"Hush!" said she, "I'm thinking."

Two or three minutes passed. The tip of Bridgetta's nose was getting blue, and the tips of her fingers and toes tingled with the cold. Sweet-

briar, however, seemed to feel nothing. She even let her cloak slip from her waist to the ground, so absorbed was she in thought.

But as Bridgetta, watchful and patient as ever, picked it up, and put it on her shoulders again, a hot tear fell on Sweetbriar's hand.

"Why, Bridgetta! crying?" said she, roused at last.

"No, no," said Bridgetta, winking and blinking.

"My dear, here's your tear! what is it?"

"So cold," murmured Bridgetta, "and you're so odd, Dame." And there was an unmistakable sob.

"We will go home then at once. I can think as we go along. Only don't speak to me."

And when, to Bridgetta's great relief, they had reached the Castle, Sweetbriar withdrew to her own room.

"I must be alone," said she; "I have to think what I had better do. Everything is confused just now."

"But you will eat this first," cried Bridgetta, who had run for bread and a bowl of milk, and held them out with trembling hands; "do eat this first."

"I must keep a clear head," said Sweetbriar; "I will eat by-and-bye, Bridgetta."

"Just as if it were so much wine," cried Bridgetta, as she went back sobbing to her kitchen.

"Oh! my dear little Dame, my dear little Dame, what is it that is coming to you?"

What had come to Sweetbriar, was the knowledge that it was time for her to make use of her fairy present—the difficulty of determining which was the safest, most advantageous, most effectively helpful thing she could wish for.

At the first blush it seemed easy enough, and natural enough, to wish boldly for the total and immediate annihilation of Cloudheart and his men.

It would be easy for the Fairy to redeem her promise in many ways. She might cause a sudden and mortal sickness to arise among the invading army, to which Cloudheart himself might be the first to fall a victim. Or there might come an earthquake which should engulph them, to the very last man, simultaneously. Or dissensions of a serious nature might arise among themselves, and they be so fully occupied in putting an end to each other, as to forget their previous mutual intention of putting an end to the little village.

No doubt that the Fairy might imagine not only these, but many other ways, by means of which Cloudheart and his men might be made to disappear from the face of the earth, without harm to Sweetbriar and her village, provided that Sweetbriar wished such a wish as that.

But Sweetbriar could not wish such a wish. She could not, even to her enemies, deliberately wish

the harm that she so earnestly desired to avert from her friends.

Moreover, if she should thus coldly desire the destruction of so many human beings, in days to come, when perhaps the little village might be assailed for the second time, and she had no fairy gift to guard it with, would not her cruelty be visited not only on herself, but on the innocent ones who had not been parties to her cowardice, but had been willing to give blow for blow? Could she ever know peace again?

With a bowed head and clasped hands she put the wicked tempting thought from her. She would not buy life itself at such a fearful price.

She might indeed wish for victory when the fight, in the natural order of events, took place. But what, few as her men were and many as were Cloudheart's, could that victory mean—but loss of life, and dire suffering, and broken hearts? A victory to them must be a victory that would leave but an empty village indeed! No! Sweetbriar would not waste her gift upon such a useless wish.

To wish, however, for a very large ready-made army, seemed more sensible, but would be, in reality, much worse. That would mean fighting in real earnest, the village laid waste and the surrounding country, and the victory, after all, uncertain.

A large army might be a protection, but it would be a sad, and not infallible, one.

Sweetbriar found that her wish singly was scarcely large enough for her wants.

The only thing that seemed at all feasible, was to wish for enormous sacks of gold and silver, and precious stones, as many as the old castle could hold in fact; and to offer the half or, indeed, three-quarters of them to Cloudheart and his men, if only they would go away. In this way the village would not only be saved from the horrors of invasion, but when the enriched invaders should be gone; would, by the help of the few remaining sacks of gold and silver, become rich and prosperous after all.

Lately Sweetbriar had allowed her thoughts to dwell so much on the possibility of rebuilding her old castle, and becoming in fact, what she was in name, the lady of the village, that the mere idea of being obliged to relinquish her cherished hope entirely, was exceedingly painful to her.

But then the terrible doubt arose—would Cloudheart be thus bought?

She sat in the gathering gloom with her hands pressed tightly to her throbbing head, and feared—not!

She had never heard of Cloudheart but as the wealthiest of marauders, and not greedy for further gold. Fighting for fighting's sake—power over all things was what he craved for. Intolerant of any attempt at resistance, he was satisfied with the knowledge that he had crushed it.

He even courted rebellion from among his own men, because rebellion must be quelled. His men might take and pillage, but they must not bargain.

He fought for towns—lands and lives, because he could not find people, easily, who cared enough about fighting to fight for trifles. But if anyone had offered to struggle with him for the possession of a wisp of straw, he would have struggled gladly, and gloried in the victory that made it his!

Wicked as he was, scourge to the earth as he was, Sweetbriar was not sure that he could be bought for money.

In this uncertainty, it was useless at present to wish for mere gold and silver. And she knew that if she decided at last to abandon her village to its fate, and think only of herself, she had better defer wishing for the sacks of gold and silver, until Cloudheart and his men were gone!

This selection of a wish promised to be a much more troublesome matter than she thought it might be.

Sweetbriar was weary of it; weary of thinking, weary of hoping one minute, and despairing the next; weary in body, too. So weary every way, that though she heard Bridgetta's footsteps outside, and her timid tapping at the door, she did not lift her voice enough to answer, "Come in!"

After three or four minutes' patient waiting, Bridgetta came in without being bidden. "Why, Dame! Dame! what can you be thinking of?"

"What am I thinking of?" asked Sweetbriar, dreamily; "I am thinking, Bridgetta, that it is a good thing we do not order our own lives—fancy being obliged to decide about everything that you intend shall happen to you!"

"Ah! that would be delightful!" said Bridgetta, enthusiastically.

"It would be torture!" said Sweetbriar, with a shudder.

"Well, don't fuss yourself, Dame, for you're not likely to be tortured that way. And now, dear, do come and eat this;" and Sweetbriar ate, crying softly all the while for very fatigue. And then, of course, Bridgetta melted too, her cheerfulness being quite on the surface.

For she knew as well as, and better than Sweetbriar, perhaps, what troublous times were coming.

Four days afterwards the snow lay deep and still all over the country, and Sweetbriar had not yet come to any decision respecting her wish. There were now but twenty-four hours left in which to decide, for in twenty-four hours the five days' delay, accorded by Cloudheart, would elapse.

There was, however, ample time for the fairy wish to take effect, if only Sweetbriar knew what to wish. But she did not know. And the more she thought over the matter, the more she puzzled her brain as to the best means of carrying out the two-fold purpose of ridding the country of Cloudheart

without sacrifice of life, and of enriching herself and her village, the more confused she became.

The only thing which seemed possible to her was to seek Cloudheart himself, to hear what he himself would say—if he refused to be bought—though of her ability to pay great sums, her life should be the guarantee. If he refused her gold, then to threaten him with her wrath. If he laughed at that, then must be the time to wish recklessly and desperately, and to let the cherished hope of riches go for ever. Then there would be time, even then, to choose between his destruction and that of her friends.

To these conclusions she had arrived not without great suffering of mind and body. She had eaten little and slept less during the last four days, and in that short space of time was changed from an unthinking girl to a woman, heartful of responsibility and anxiety. The rapid transition had crushed her strength—moral as well as physical. Her head ached, and her limbs, and her slender upright form was bent, her senses reeled, and her eyes saw things that were not, and her calm forsook her. She could do nothing now, in the exaggerated state of activity in which her brain was, but things that were exaggerated too. And what wonder was there that she could not rest quiet, but rose that night when all the rest of the world was asleep, and dressed stealthily lest

Bridgetta should hear her, and prevent her doing as she chose, and without food or drink slipped quietly out of her window, leaving only the following note for Bridgetta to see the first thing in the morning—

"I am gone to see Cloudheart. Be full of courage, for I shall be sure to think of something that will save us all.—Sweetbriar."

Down the road she ran, as fast as the snow would let her, full of new-born hopes and perfect confidence.

The village lay asleep, or looked so, in its clean white snow-sheets, and Sweetbriar passed through its one short winding street unseen, which, if she had thought about the matter at all, she would have declared was lucky indeed; for how many arms would have forcibly held her back, if the owners of them had but known where she was and what was her errand that dreary winter night, she must well have known!

She had soon left the village far behind her, and had turned aside from the road, and was just entering upon the outskirts of the moorland that separated the village from Cloudheart's encampment. The snow lay thick on the ground, but not too thick as yet to obliterate all signs of the little beaten-down pathways that cut through furze and broom in all directions. These pathways were familiar enough to Sweetbriar, and perhaps too,

a sense specially vouchsafed to those who are little able to reason—something besides mere knowledge of locality—may have helped her to find her way as easily as a dog would have found his, and to keep to it unerringly.

The stars too were shining, not brightly, but here and there, in ones and twos—not countless thousands; and there were ominous black clouds gathering round, so that as Sweetbriar glanced upwards with untroubled eyes, she told herself, yet without alarm, that one by one the stars were being covered, and that very shortly there would be none at all to guide her on her way.

More snow was coming down—that was very evident—so she redoubled her speed and ran, or rather scrambled through the snow as fast as her poor little legs could carry her.

All her thoughts were centred on what she should say to Cloudheart, when she came face to face with him.

How persuade him? How threaten? She thought as rapidly as she walked, and walked as rapidly as she thought, so that body and mind wearing away together, the fatigue of neither predominated.

It was not until she stumbled into a rabbit hole and fell, that she awoke to know how exhausted she was already. She was unhurt, but it seemed to her as though she were bruised all over, when she

attempted to rise. Indeed, it was not without difficulty and a certain sense of dismay at the many miles she had yet to go, that she did rise and go on her way. For the moor was fully ten miles across, and when she looked about her, and recognised the position of certain hills which might have appeared as clouds to a less practised eye, she knew that she had not come more than two miles of the way at most, and she was stiff with fatigue already.

She pushed on, however, stumbling here and there — and uncomplainingly picking herself up again — sometimes because of the holes, often because of her fast failing strength; and thus, though she did her very best, she progressed but very slowly. Besides, the snow now began to fall very heavily again, and the wind drove it into her eyes and blinded her; and it was very dark, for the clouds that had rolled together side by side, with great starry gaps between them, had now met, and closed in the light. Sweetbriar could see nothing now but the whiteness of the snow that lay beneath her feet—the rest was all darkness.

Not very much longer did she plod on, half dazed with cold and fatigue, and heart-sick with disappointment.

For she saw clearer now. She knew that she had attempted to do that which was impossible: she had trusted too blindly to her own unaided

strength; she had been too secure of success; she had been, above all, greedy of riches. The Fairy's warning came to her mind—"Recollect that if you wish for riches you may, perhaps, live to remember, with bitter regret, that there are some blessings that money cannot buy, and that your wish might have given you!" In her heart of hearts, Sweetbriar knew that she had longed for riches, and she knew, too, that time was pressing, and that if her village was to be saved she must be content to be poor for ever, and wish at once for their safety—she knew that she could not reach Cloudheart's camp that night.

So she began counting the hundred backwards, rapidly but carefully. It is not an easy thing to do at any time, quickly and correctly! but when painfully in earnest, as was Sweetbriar, one does not make mistakes.

She got safely as far as twenty-five; she could walk no further, and she dropped on her knees, trembling and shivering; but she did not stop counting.

She could not have risen from the ground again if she had tried to do so; but she did not try; she let herself fall back softly on the snow, and, dimly aware as she was of the fatal meaning of her content, and of her sleepfulness, still gave way willingly to it, only too glad to be at rest again.

"Eighteen, seventeen, sixteen—" I am coming

to the end, she thought; and then whispered—"These little white things come in my eyes, Bridgetta,—will you take them away?"

She counted down to five aloud; then smiled to herself in the darkness. She was, she thought, so near the end now. She was glad she had been so careful. "Four, three, two, one!" She sighed heavily—relieved that the wearisome task was done.

Now she must wish—she scarcely knew what; but she felt she must wish at once.

So she made a great effort, and raised herself from the ground.

"Bridgetta!" cried she quite loudly, "where are you? I wish—I wish"—and then she said faintly—"Oh! how I wish that Cloudheart may be merciful!"

She fell back exhausted, and with closed eyes, and the snow soon cast a soft white veil about her quiet form, and over her peaceful white face.

Faithful Sweetbriar! It had not occurred to her to wish herself safe home again!

It was Cloudheart himself, next morning, on his way to the village, at the head of five hundred of his men, who found her, a little placid figure, half hidden in the snow; and he had not done marvelling at her pale happy face, and lamenting the sad fate that had overtaken so young and delicate a creature, when a little band of village people came

towards him, struggling eagerly through the snow in quest of what he had just found. And when he saw their grief—a grief so great that it left no room for fear in their hearts, and they scarcely noticed either Cloudheart or his armed men—he asked them, with a flushed face and a beating heart, who this young girl was.

"Our little Dame!" said one or two hushed voices—"our little, loving Sweetbriar!"



"She wished to intercede with you—that is what we think," said another.

They said no more, and uttered no reproaches; but Cloudheart knew, as he looked down on his poor little foe, that while he had been feasting and making merry during that cold winter's night, she had yielded up her innocent life in a vain attempt to save her friends; and it was with a burning

blush of shame that he unsheathed his sword and laid the hilt gently between her little hands.

"We have surely fought," said he, "and the victory lies with your little Dame. No harm shall come to any of you, that I can prevent, so long as I shall live."

The wish was granted; for Cloudheart was merciful!

But how well it would be for all to know what Sweetbriar learnt by such sad experience: that the responsibility of ordering our own lives, and obtaining our wishes, would be too great for us!

THE PRINCESS POPPY.

THE PRINCESS POPPY.

It was high time, indeed, that some decision should be made—either the Prince must choose one of the Princesses for his bride, or he must go back to his own country. He had now been staying at the palace for more than three months, ostensibly on a visit to the King, but in reality for the purpose of choosing a bride from among the King's four daughters.

It was highly important that a marriage should take place between this particular Prince and one of these royal ladies, because the kingdoms of the two fathers joined; and it had been arranged that the succession to both crowns should be secured to the Prince, who was an only child, and to the Princess he should select for his consort.

This was, of course, a very satisfactory arrangement for the Prince, and, perhaps, scarcely less so for the Princesses, who, being all equally attractive, had each one as good a chance as her sisters of pleasing his royal highness, and of reigning with him over her father's kingdom.

The Prince had himself been fortunate enough to please not only the young Princesses, every one of them, but almost everybody else, in or out of the palace, which is saying much for his tact and amiability. Unfortunately, however, either the Princesses, despite their charming manners and appearance, did not happen to please the Prince, or he must have been of a very vacillating disposition, for although three months had passed, he had made no selection, and, indeed had given no sign of any preference whatever.

And yet, when respectfully and discreetly sounded as to his views on the subject, he always replied with alacrity that he was quite aware that such a marriage was too much in accordance with the wishes of his beloved parents, and too greatly to his own interests, for him to feel any apathy on the subject; and that his earnest desire was to obtain the hand of one of the Princesses.

It would have been contrary to etiquette to question the Prince further; and those persons who had the words, "Yes! but *which* of them?" on the tip of their tongue, were compelled to keep them there.

Meanwhile everything was done to make the visit of the Prince a pleasant one; and there were court balls, court dinners, state concerts, and garden parties innumerable.

It was during one of the latter entertainments

that the King, impelled by a sudden resolve, linked his arm within that of the young Prince, and gently drew him away from the crowd.

After they had walked together in silence some few yards down a shady and sheltered side path—

"The tops of the trees are beginning to turn grey," observed the King.

"Grey, sire?" enquired the Prince, a little surprised.

"I mean brown! It is the same thing, however. When summer is over the leaves turn brown; when youth is past, we turn grey—alas!"

"Alas!" murmured the Prince, politely.

"The—the—the dormouse seeks its little nest—h'm—h'm; the snake curls himself up in the hollow of a tree; the—the flies—the flies retire somewhere; the polar bear—h'm—h'm—scrapes himself a hole in the snow,"

The Prince bowed, having no objection to make to these private winter arrangements, and at a loss for a remark.

"Time flies!" said the King presently.

The Prince bowed again.

"It does, sire," said he—"alas!"

"Eh? what did you say?" asked the King. with his hand to his ear: his Majesty was troubled at times with deafness.

"I concurred, sire, in the view your Majesty takes of time. I said 'It does.'"

"Yes! and you added—?"

"Alas!" repeated the Prince, sighing a little closer to the King's ear.

"I thought so! And why that melancholy 'alas!' Prince, from your young lips? I have read my book, and am already at the final chapters; but you are young, and are scarcely beyond the preface."

"But, sire, we all know that your Majesty's book has been a pleasant one to read, and we all devoutly trust and believe that the final chapters thereof may be both pleasant and lengthy ones. Whereas I, sire, know not what complications may arise during the perusal of mine; what plot and underplot it may be mine to unravel; what are the characters with which I shall have to do; what are likely to be the temptations of indifference, carelessness, slurring-over, to which, by the very nature of the book, I may be exposed. Shall I weary of it all before the tale is told; or shall I feel so deep an interest as to dread the ending of it?

"Sire, I do not fear to read the story of my life —I only fear lest I should not understand aright the thing which has been written down for me to read."

"Very good metaphor, and very nicely kept up," said the King. "I quite agree with you, Prince. Life is but a rivulet that, starting from the height that gave it birth, laughs upon its early downward

way until it reaches the—the plain. It knows that it will reach the sea one day, but knows not when, or how, what route it should select, what obstacles it may encounter, or—or what falls it may fall over!"

"Charming!" murmured the Prince.

"What I meant to say, Prince, is this," explained the King—"I think it is high time for me to be—to be—to be thinking, in fact, of retiring into my shell."

The Prince, somewhat taken unawares by the sudden change of metaphor, could not, at the moment, call to mind a sufficiently distinguished looking shell-fish to which he might with courtesy compare the King, and contented himself therefore with merely bowing again.

"I have long desired, Prince, that the succession to my Crown should be finally determined, in order that I might divide duties with my successor. To the 'business' of my position I am still equal. It is its pleasures that so greatly fatigue me. Now, unfortunately, I have no son."

"Alas!" said the Prince. Suddenly calling to mind, however, that he had already made frequent use of this word, and conscious that it did not after all accurately express the state of his feelings on the subject, he immediately added—

"I would fain take the place of a son to your Majesty, if I could!"

"Do!" exclaimed the King.

"Gladly, Sire," said the Prince, smiling.

They stopped to unlink arms, and pressed each other's hands warmly.

Then they again linked arms and continued their walk.

"I understand—" presently began the King; "I have heard with pleasure, Prince, that your choice has fallen—upon—upon—"

"It affords me also, Sire, the liveliest satisfaction to learn that—that the successor named by your Majesty is, so far—"

There was a short pause.

"I see, Prince," said the King, "that we perfectly understand one another."

"I feel honored inexpressibly by your Majesty's frankness, and choice."

There was another short pause.

"But I have not chosen," said the King, abruptly; "it is for you to choose."

"Your Majesty must surely be the best judge of what are the Princesses' separate and several qualifications as successors to a throne!"

"Surely your Royal Highness must have a predilection one way or another?" cried the King.

"None whatever," said the Prince, firmly. "All four Princesses are charming. The fifth, as the King knows, I am not acquainted with as yet."

"It seems to me, Prince, as though they were

too charming," said the irritated King and father. "And your Royal Highness might, perhaps, have preferred to seek a bride where a choice would not be so difficult a matter."

It was easy to see that the King was annoyed, and the Prince thought it time (as it was indeed!) to explain his seeming indifference to him.

"Should your Majesty honour me by bestowing upon me the hand of one of the Princesses," said he, gravely, "I shall endeavour to do my duty to her Royal Highness, and to her people. But, in order that I may do fully my duty, it will be necessary that my wife should know hers! I have been here more than three months, and I have as yet learnt absolutely nothing of the different characters and dispositions of the Princesses They have all been equally charming, equally cordial, equally accomplished. They have all danced a little, played and sung, and talked a little in the same manner, more or less. They have passed the days in the same way. They express the same opinions on all subjects. What, Sire, am I to learn from such conventional similarity of demeanour and occupation? Nothing! And yet, Sire, I cannot think for a moment that those four young girls are as alike in disposition as outwardly they seem to be! A too strict adherence to matters of custom and a too rigid observance of the rules of etiquette, are most likely the causes

of this puzzling uniformity in appearance. And in this uniformity there is this danger, Sire, that the lady I might thus blindfolded, as it were, select for the companion of my life, might be the very one for whose particular virtues I have the least admiration; whereas my faults might be those very ones for which she has the least tolerance. Thus blindfolded, I repeat, it seems to me as if it were surely best to abide by the decision of the only person who is likely to know which of the Princesses is best fitted to become a great queen and a good wife. That, Sire, is all I have to say."

"It is very clear to me," said the King, "that you do not care personally for either of my daughters."

"I think, Sire, that one of the Princesses must be more excellent than the others. Your Majesty might help me by pointing out that particular Princess."

It was now the King's turn to bow acquiescence. The Prince was, he felt, right!

"The Princesses," said he, "have been all brought up by the same devoted friend to whose care they were confided by their dying mother. She has endeavoured to form their characters after an ideal of her own. They are too young to intrude their own opinions upon her, and I cannot tell what their own opinions or characters may be. I am intimate with only one of my daughters, and

that is little Pop. If you must have my advice, Prince, here it is. Take Pop."

The Prince looked up enquiringly.

"Pop! the Princess Poppæa. She has been away for some months on a visit to her aunt, and you have yet to make her acquaintance. She returned this morning only, and is no doubt in the garden at this present moment."

"Oh!" said the Prince, who did not feel inclined to take the King's advice now that he had given it. For he had heard of the Princess Poppy, if he had not seen her.

Poor child! She was the fifth of the Princesses, nicknamed Poppy or Pop, because she had a foolish habit of blushing scarlet, whenever anyone addressed her or even looked at her, and because her hands were generally very red. She was, indeed, no beauty, it appeared, and in this respect differed very materially from her four beautiful sisters.

As the Prince said "Oh!" in that doubtful tone of voice, they emerged from the laurel-lined pathway and came upon a large open lawn, in the midst of which was a fountain playing over a large round stone basin.

A young lady was leaning over the border, busily engaged in feeding some gold fish with crumbs of bread. She had her back towards them, and was quite alone, although there were several groups of guests walking and sitting within sight of her.

The King stepped softly behind her, smiling to himself. And, of course, the Prince followed his example at a short distance, and without a smile.

"Why, Pop!" exclaimed the King, pleasantly. The Princess gave a shrill scream, and dropped all her bread into the water, whereon, regardless of the King's presence, the gold fish fought for it like scaly little Trojans, and turning abruptly round, presented to their view a crimson face, and held a pink, wet, crummy hand towards the Prince, without waiting quietly, as she ought, for him to be named to her by the King. The Prince, however, took her finger-tips in his, and bending low, endeavoured to imprint a kiss on her Royal Highness's hand, which she had extended palm downwards, which implied such permission. But he was prevented. Not a little startled at this well-meant courtesy on the part of the Prince, the Princess stepped hastily a step backwards, knocking her heel violently against the stone brim of the fountain.

The blow being unmistakably painful, she immediately lifted her poor little foot from the ground with a murmured—"Oh! dear me!" This quick movement, unfortunately, caused her to lose her balance. She staggered, and clutched wildly at the nearest support; which happened to be the Prince's arm. Meanwhile the King, with firm decided grasp, had reinstated his struggling daughter on her feet, but



"LYING SURPRISED ON HIS BACK IN THE FOUNTAIN."

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the Prince thus unexpectedly pulled out of all equilibrium, was lying surprised on his back in the fountain, in a foot and a-half of water, and gold fish, and bread-crumbs.

Imagine the confusion!

The Prince, however, whatever his feelings were, controlled them admirably. Indeed, the dismay of the King, the distress of the ladies and gentlemen, who assisted him to scramble out of the water, and the evident horror and remorse of the poor little Princess, were so great, that he found himself obliged to forget his own share in the accident, and to console all the others; in which charitable office he was assisted by a naturally sweet temper, and a marked sense of the ridiculous.

By-and-by everything was calm again. The Prince had changed his clothes, the King had been seen to laugh, the gentlemen's brows cleared as if by magic, the ladies recovered from their fainting fits, and things went on as usual.

Nothing more, however, was seen that day of the Princess Poppæa—she was too overwhelmed with dismay and confusion to be present at either banquet or ball that evening; but sat, alternately weeping and laughing, in her own rooms by herself.

It was in vain that the Prince, who was one of the most perfectly good tempered creatures in the world, begged of every one of the Princess's ladies, in turn, to convey his regrets to the Princess

Poppæa, that his own want of steadiness should have caused her Royal Highness so much annoyance, and his absolute despair at finding that she so persistently remained absent from the ball-room.

The Princess Pop only grew redder and redder, and began to cry afresh at every succeeding message, vowing that she could never—never—never—possibly look the Prince again in the face as long as she lived, and ending with a peal of uncontrollable laughter, that sent all her ladies and attendants into fits of laughter also!

Certainly the Prince, who had complained so feelingly of the uninteresting uniformity of the other four Princesses, could not have found fault with the fifth on that score! She was as unlike them as she could well be, and this dissimilarity did not seem to be to her advantage; and she, poor child! knew it. The scrutinising Prince himself could not have been more painfully aware than she was herself of her own inferiority in appearance and deportment. Besides which, the violent mark that she had herself placed on the beginning of her acquaintance with the Prince, had left so deep an impression on her mind that in his presence she was a thousand times more nervous, and flushed twice as crimson and had pinker hands than before any one else.

No! the Prince was not captivated by this last Princess, and still, with polite persistency, adhered

to his wish that the King himself should present him with a bride of his own choosing—from among the other four Princesses.

The King sighed, hesitated and sighed again, and, after much consultation with his oldest and truest friends, came to a conclusion—which was this: the Prince was to leave the country for the space of eighteen months. Half of the council had been inclined to think that one year's absence would suffice. The other half had not been able to alter their opinion, which was that two years' absence was not at all too much, and so the happy medium of eighteen months had been fixed on, and nobody was satisfied. During that time, the five young Princesses were to reside each in a different town of equal importance in their father's kingdom. The government of the town was to be given up entirely to them. They were to have each of them a large sum of money to spend as they thought best. They were to hold no communication whatever with the Court of their father, but were to be in every way mistresses of themselves and of their household, which they were to form themselves, making their own appointments, and selecting their own friends. The Princesses, of course, being simply informed that such eighteen months' retirement from Court, and such assumption of eighteen months' self-dependence and self-rule, formed part of their royal father's plan of education.

The Prince and all the Princesses were delighted with this plan—for very different reasons. The Prince, because it gave him a chance of learning what were the separate characteristics of the Princesses. And the Princesses, because they thought it would be very good fun to do exactly as they pleased.

This plan being, therefore, decided upon, it was thought proper that no time should be lost in carrying it out, and the day was fixed on for the Prince's departure.

The morning of that day, he requested permission to take leave of the Princesses, and was received by them, surrounded by their ladies, in their own drawing-room.

The usual polite speeches were, of course, interchanged, and the Princesses were cordial and amiable as usual, and each, one after the other, expressed her sincere hope that she might at no very distant period experience the pleasure of meeting his Royal Highness again. And the Prince smiled and bowed, and was of course duly grateful to each Princess in her turn; but, sharp-eyed to a fault, he noticed that on one or two pretty mouths there was a covert smile! In some faces, indeed, the smile seemed very much inclined to grow into a laugh, and more than once he fancied that he heard a half smothered giggle behind his back.

He could not account for their evident amusement. There was, he felt certain, nothing in his personal appearance to excite ridicule; and yet, he felt convinced that these young ladies were laughing at him. The graver, the more serious he looked, the more difficult it seemed for them to keep their countenance.

Young girls are young girls in whatever station of life they may be, and are liable to fall into very much the same sins of thoughtlessness, unless they are very careful or have very tender hearts; and though that rigid observance of the rules of etiquette to which the Prince had made objection prevented these Princesses from laughing outright, still, they were not able or did not care to hide their amusement.

The Prince was scarlet with annoyance, and hurried his adieux, until he came to where the Princess Poppy was standing.

She, so far from laughing, looked the picture of distress, and was even still more red in the face than the Prince. For not only her cheeks, but her forehead, her ears, her chin, and her nose were the colour of scarlet poppies!

There was, however, not the shadow of a covert smile on her upturned face, and so the Prince quite forgot that she had pushed him into a fountain the first time they met, and bade her "good-bye" with much simple cordiality. And having once

again bowed low in a general way, was about to leave the room, when—surely he heard a giggle this time? A faint but decided giggle in two or three different tones of voice. He stopped short, almost involuntarily.

"Why! what can possibly be the matter with me!" thought he. At the same moment, he heard the rustle of a silk dress. It was the Princess Poppy!

She had left her place among her sisters and their ladies, and was coming straight towards him with an air of quiet dignity which she very rarely wore, and which became her well. The tears stood in her eyes, and she could scarcely stand, so greatly her limbs trembled for very shyness. And when she had reached where the Prince stood, not a little surprised, she lifted one pink cold hand, as if deprecating any sudden outburst of wrath on his part, and said agitatedly—

"Prince, I cannot refrain from mentioning that everybody is at the palace to-day. The galleries are crowded. Everyone is anxious to take leave of the Prince. And, do not be angry, but you have *an enormous smut on your nose!*"

It was but natural that the Prince should look the picture of horror, and exclaimed shortly, "Where?"

"On the tip," said the Princess, pointing to the exact spot with one shaky finger, and presenting her scent bottle with the other hand.

The Prince rubbed.

"Is it gone, Princess?"

"Not quite. It was enormous. There! that will do now!" said she, greatly relieved to find that he was not angry.

The smut was gone in a moment, and so was the Prince. But the recollection he carried away of the Princess Poppy, was not of her awkward reception of him or of her red hands.

At the end of precisely eighteen months, the Prince returned to pay a second visit to the King, who received him with great manifestations of satisfaction.

"Dear friend," said his Majesty, when the first warm greetings had been exchanged, "I have received most interesting accounts from my daughters of their sojourn in their respective towns; and as I wish for no delay, I have decided to pay a visit to-morrow to my eldest daughter in her own home."

The Prince being scarcely less anxious and curious than the King, expressed his entire approval of this speedy visit to her eldest Royal Highness; and the next day, therefore, the King, the Prince, and a very modest suite, consisting only of five or six gentlemen, left the palace in one coach and six, and two coaches and four.

The outskirts of the town were reached in about fifty-six hours—it being needless to recount how

the travellers rested and took refreshment several times in the course of their journey.

Within a mile or two of the town gates they were met by the Princess Wuntha and her suite, the Princess immediately leaving her own carriage and entering that in which were the King and the young Prince. Her Royal Highness seemed to be in excellent health and spirits, and so really overjoyed to find herself once more with the King, her father, that at first she took no notice of anyone else. When she was seated by his side, she turned politely towards the Prince.

"Flap-top murky Bangleum!" remarked she, smilingly.

The Prince coloured slightly, and glanced towards the King; but the King turned somewhat quickly to his daughter, and said—"What?"

"Flap-top murky Bangleum!" repeated the Princess, with a little air of gentle surprise—immediately adding, as if to assist their memory—"Poppletoeflap!"

By this time the amazement depicted in the countenances of both gentlemen was such as to strike the most unobservant of persons.

"Oh dear, dear me!" explained the Princess, "how thoughtless I am! I am so accustomed now to speak nothing but our glorious old mother tongue, the—alas!—now nearly occult language of the Swampifrogglians, who, as you are aware, Sire,

peopled this vast territory when the kingdom was but one vast bog, fen, marsh, swamp, or morass; not, indeed, that these terms are exactly synonymous, but opinions differing on the subject, I myself, in order to prevent endless discussion, am in the habit of employing all terms indifferently and in turn, when alluding to the of late accurately ascertained condition of the country, when the last Swampifrogglian expired, which melancholy event took place, according to three separate and thoroughly comprehensive calculations, no less than fifteen and three quarter trillion, billion, million hundred thousand, nine hundred and four seconds ago, counting up to midnight last Saturday."

The Princess having said this much, and receiving no answer but an acquiescent bow from the Prince, leant back in her seat, and having glanced upwards with a critical eye, remarked—

"Dordle fac tippety—Pardon me, a matter of habit; I mean that I think it will be a wet afternoon."

"The sentence must have been an exceedingly useful one to your Royal Highness's ancestors," observed the Prince.

"It must have been used constantly in their conversations," said the Princess, with alacrity. "We have, by which I mean, with pardonable pride perhaps, that *they* having, I, being their descendent, have also, the following pretty varia-

tions of 'Dordle fac tippety'—'We shall have a wet afternoon,' namely, 'Tip fac dordle'—'It may turn out a wet afternoon,' and, simply and tersely, by a mere change of vowel, 'Dardle'—'It wets,' or as we should modernly say, 'It rains.'"

The Prince bowed.

By this time the gates of the town were reached, and the Princess, who was really a very worthy person, and anxious to do her duties, turned to the King and said heartily—

"I do indeed trust that your Majesty will be pleased with the efforts I have made to advance the cause of—of erudition in this town, and will approve of the way in which I have spent the money entrusted to my care."

"Well, well, well! we shall see by-and-by!" said the King.

The Prince thought to himself that he, personally, had already seen.

There were very few people in the first streets through which they passed to welcome the Princess, and what people there were, were polite, and nothing more. And, moreover, the politeness was for the King, who was too kindly a man not to be very popular. To the Princess, however, everybody was, more or less, indifferent; and it was no wonder; for she sat straight up in her seat, neither looking to the right nor to the left, and taking no notice of anything.

It was easy to see that the King was annoyed, and that the Prince was ill at ease, and so the Princess, who was by no means unintelligent, observed smilingly, "The people in this part of the town, Sire, are not loyal. When we reach the Halls of Science it will be different."

"We should be popular everywhere," said the King, quietly.

The Princess looked slightly surprised, but made no further remark.

When the carriages reached the Halls of Science, which were new buildings, not entirely completed, but in a sufficiently advanced state to show that they would one day be marvels of richness and splendour, consisting as they did of the rarest marbles of Egypt, Carrara, and Paros—the pillars being of jasper or gypsum, and the incrustations of cornelian, onyx, and beryl, and such precious matters, there was certainly no lack of enthusiasm. The very scaffoldings around the buildings were crowded with people, and the reception given to the royal party was, if somewhat wanting in hearty vigour, at least sincere and general.

"This, Sire," said the smiling and bowing Princess—"This, Sire, is my little kingdom—these are my soldiers—all men of the most profound learning, whose leader in a noble cause I am indeed proud to be! Our object, Sire, is to take by assault —to storm—to conquer the hitherto baffling secrets

of our glorious past! That, Sire, is the hall where the too-long-forgotten language of the Swampi-frogglians will be taught. At present we have confiscated to our use one of the public gardens, over which we have erected a wooden building. This will be splendid, will it not, Sire, when the malachite doors are added?"

"It must have cost—or will cost—a great deal of money," said the King. The Princess, unseen of course by any one, playfully pinched the King's arm, and said in a very low voice—

"Dearest old darling—yes! But I know how generous you can be," then added louder, "I have reduced my expenditure in every possible way, your Majesty, in order to meet the great demands made upon my purse—for instance, I take no sugar either in my tea or in my coffee; and I and my ladies are in the habit of wearing stuff dresses only; we think that every penny that can possibly be spared should go to the glorious cause. And if your Majesty will only permit me to remain in this town, I have no doubt that in time, by force of example and perseverance, I may be able to induce this apathetic population to take a proper interest in, and contribute largely to, the furtherance of our schemes for its own enlightenment."

"I have no doubt!" said the King, who was rapidly making up his mind that he would permit nothing of the sort.

At this moment the carriage drew up before the space which was to be filled with the malachite doors, and a deputation of twenty or thirty learned gentlemen came out of the building and close to the carriage doors, when they were severally presented to the King by the Princess Wuntha herself.

When the presentations were made, and at a sign from the Princess, the foremost of the learned gentlemen stepped a little forward, and with a profound obeisance addressed the King in the following manner—

"Farsikol Torrilop!"

The King started slightly, and instantly assumed that air of quiet dignity, which, being naturally a very simple amiable man, he had only assumed perhaps three or four times in his life, but each time with such wonderful effect, that the sentence "as dignified as the King," had passed into a proverb in his country.

This time also it was effective. The orator paused, gasped, and grew crimson — the Prince was forced to bite his lip in the most determined manner to prevent a smile, which would not only have been indiscreet, but would, he felt sure, have grown into a shout of laughter, had he given way to it.

The King had never before in his life been addressed as a "Farsikol Torrilop," and whatever it might mean, he did not like it.

"Sire," stammered the Princess, "the words just used signify in Swampifrogglian, 'Glorious Monarch'; but perhaps your Majesty may prefer to hear the speech in our modern version of the language."

"Not at all—not at all!" said the King, who would assuredly rather not have heard the speech in either language, but who felt sorry for his own want of quick perception, and for the discomfiture of the speaker. "We shall be pleased to hear you speak, sir, in—in any way you like," said his Majesty, kindly, "and have no doubt that if we close our eyes, and concentrate our thoughts, we may—we may—" Here the King closed his eyes and concentrated his thoughts, and the orator began his speech, which, though somewhat lengthy, must have been very interesting, for at the end of it, the King found some difficulty in opening his eyes, and coming back to the matters that were in hand.

"Where are we?" he enquired in a low voice of the Princess.

"We are about to proceed to the Museum of Swampifrogglian Antiquities, which is in course of construction at another end of the town."

"Oh!" said the King—no other remark occurring to him at that moment.

It did not even occur to the Prince to say "Oh!" because he must have added "Princess!" in order

to avoid familiarity; and "Oh! Princess!" sounds too much like the beginning of further remarks, which not being in a position to make, he contented himself with merely bowing.

On the way to the museum, the Princess did not fail to inform the King of the numerous and varied antiquities which had been dug out of a neighbouring fen, marsh, bog, swamp, or morass-land, that evidently belonged to the Swampifrogglian era.

"We hope to find an almost infinite quantity of these invaluable relics," said she; "but, of course, time and money both are required in order to——"

"Oh! there are the hospitals!" exclaimed the King. "Dear, dear me! it only seems yesterday that I opened the new building with your dear mother, Wuntha, and you were a little creature only two years old; the stones were so nice and white then, and now, how dirty it all is!"

"Dear me! and I presume they still carry sick persons there?" said the Princess, regarding the plain dark building with an air of polite interest through her eye-glass. "I was not aware that this building was a hospital."

"What's that melancholy, abandoned-looking place to the right?" enquired the King; "I do not remember that."

"That?" said the Princess, with some contempt in her tone. "They were in the habit of playing frivolous modern tragedies and foolish comedies

there, and there were concerts of music—the place was a mere snare for the idle. I am glad to say that on Monday week I finally closed it.

"The speech I made on the occasion was thought good, I believe. I discoursed on the superiority of the more learned pursuits as compared with the merely intellectual amusements of—of frivolous persons. I can just give you the heads as we go."

The Prince here found his tongue, and spoke indeed quite rapidly, half-addressing the King, and half the Princess—"Surely the dear Princess will not be so cruel as to give us the heads of her discourse only! How truly delightful would it be to listen to it all at—at some future time, when our minds are calm and seriously disposed, and we can lean back in our chairs and close our eyes, and say to ourselves—'This is going to be a treat; let us make the most of it, and thoroughly—fully—entirely——'" Here the Prince broke down, and looked at the King.

"Yes—yes! fully and entirely—fully and entirely!" said the King, with a rapid glance at the Prince.

"But you would so much better enter into the spirit of the thing, Sire, if I just merely mentioned one or two."

"Not now!" said the King, so decidedly that the Princess could not argue the matter with his Majesty any longer; she, therefore, leant back in

her seat, looking so thoroughly disgusted, that the Prince again found a remark to make.

"Not now!" repeated he—"alas!"

The Princess's brow cleared.

"Your Royal Highness's patience will not go unrewarded," said she. "Before the banquet this evening I promise myself the great pleasure of receiving and presenting to the King a deputation of all the learned women that are in the town at present. They number some two hundred, I believe, but only some few of them will speak. I myself must of course address them, and shall endeavour to interest your Royal Highness for an hour or so."

"Your Royal Highness must be very tired at the close of day," said the subdued Prince.

"Very; I rise at five—write my lectures till eight. At eight I breakfast, and during breakfast, to save time, receive my secretaries, who read my letters to me, and write others at my dictation. I then study the Swampifrogglian language until twelve. At twelve I take a beaten-up egg in wine, and drive to the Hall of Science, where I superintend the works until two. At two I take my second repast, during which my secretaries read my letters, and I dictate to them others. At half past three I drive to the museum to superintend the works there. At six I return home, and receive deputations and hear petitions until eight. At eight I

dine. At ten I receive the eminent scholars of the town and their wives, regardless of rank or fortune, and speak on congenial topics for one hour and a-half. I then retire to rest."

It is not necessary to follow the royal party any farther. There was a banquet, and a reception later, at which the Princess spoke on "Swampi-frogglian relics," with great fluency, for one hour and ten minutes, addressing herself frequently to the illustrious guests of the evening, and did not perceive, as everybody else did, that his Majesty had yawned twice and a-half—the third yawn having been successfully arrested half way.

As for the Prince, he was of so really amiable a nature that he still smiled and bowed, and was so pleasant as to win all hearts, although his eyelids felt as if surely they must be made of lead, so sleepy was he; and no ragged little street boy could ever have cried "hooray!" at the sight of a sixpence, with greater rapture than the King could have cried "hooray!" when he beheld the carriage that was to take him home.

A week elapsed before the visit to the second Princess was made. The town in which she lived was not very far from the capital, and the King was only obliged to leave the palace at a very early hour in order to reach her residence at sunset.

The royal carriage came within sight of the town

gates accordingly at about seven o'clock, and not a little anxiety and some curiosity might have been read in the countenances of the King and the Prince; for, indeed, they were both anxious and curious to learn what was the line of conduct, or what were the tastes, of the second Princess; nor was the tone of the remark made by her eldest sister (each Princess, her reception of the King being over, was to accompany him on his visits to the other Princesses) calculated to render them less anxious or curious.

"Poor Sgunda!" said she, smiling, as if in pity; "this will interfere with her afternoon snooze."

As on the occasion of the visit to the Princess Wuntha, the royal carriage was to be met by that of the second Princess about a mile from the town; but they had almost reached the town gates and no carriage was to be seen. The Princess was evidently very much behind her time.

The order, therefore, was given to drive very slowly. The King looked as annoyed as it was possible for so indulgent a parent to look; the Prince came to a series of rapid conclusions in his own mind; and the Princess Wuntha leant back in her seat, with a most superior expression of countenance, while all the lords and ladies and attendants, even down to the lackeys behind the carriages, became hotter and redder, or colder and paler, according to their different temperaments, at the terrible prospect

of the King being actually "kept waiting"!—his Majesty being one of the most punctual of monarchs.

It was not, indeed, till the order, "Drive slower," had been so repeatedly given, that the royal party were positively being dragged along the road at a snail's pace, and even with that precaution had arrived within a very few hundred yards of the town gates, that a great cloud of dust was perceived above the low wal that encircled the town, and everybody, regardless of etiquette, cried out, at the same moment—"There she comes! here she comes!"

You could not see the carriages, but you could see the dust whirling along the top of the wall in a tremendous hurry, and then you could see the tops of glittering helmets with flying plumes, scampering after it, and surrounded by it, and followed by it.

The King smiled—chuckled—then laughed outright. It was a most ridiculous thing to see these evidences of people in such hot haste as that, and yet not see the people themselves; and it amused him so much, that by the time the Princess's carriage, with its steaming, foaming horses, and the red-faced panting outriders, and equally red-faced panting guard of honour, came up close, he did not feel very angry, and received his flushed and contrite daughter kindly enough, and only said—

"Come, come, Princess! a little late as usual!"

The Princess blushed deeply of course; but the Prince immediately engaging her in conversation,

the matter was dropped, and the whole party proceeded to her residence.

On the way thither it was very apparent that the townspeople were not wanting in loyalty, for they were respectfully affectionate in their greeting to the King and the Princesses, and there were plenty of flags and flowers and red baize everywhere, and no lack of people to shout—"Long live the King!" But there was no special allusion in any way that had been made to the little Princess, who had resided for eighteen months in their midst: none of the flags bore her initials; nobody in the crowd shouted her particular name; nothing was there to show that she had rendered herself at all popular; indeed, less notice was taken of her than had been taken of the Princess Wuntha in her own town: for the Princess Sgunda had not even a special number of protégés to especially welcome her—the royal family was very dear to their hearts, but it was evident that their own particular Princess was not a bit dearer to them than her sisters.

The Princess, however, seemed perfectly indifferent to this. She sat still, with a very amiable expression of countenance, that said nothing at all—the same polite, yet slightly vacant look, which all four Princesses had been in the habit of wearing in their faces when they were all accustomed to carry themselves according to the instructions of their governess. The expression, indeed, was a modest

one, and in the case of a young lady sitting at home with her family would have been both charming and appropriate; but in the case of a Princess responding to the greetings of a loyal people, it was insufficiently animated, and greatly disappointed the King, who was heartily pleased with the way in which he was received.

"My dear child, do look as if you were pleased," whispered he.

But Sgunda could only look as she felt, and she did not feel particularly pleased—she only felt placid.

It appeared that she lived precisely in the same manner as she had lived at the palace of her father: she knew nothing about the town in which she had been living, and had taken not the slightest interest in any of its works or plans; she had interfered, it is true, with nobody, and nobody bore her any ill will; but she had not done anything to please anybody, and nobody loved her; she had given very few entertainments, and had had few receptions; she had visited only one or two of the great noblemen's houses in the neighbourhood, and had thus hurt the feelings of all the rest whom she did not visit.

Moreover, the large sum of money, which had been granted for her use and pleasure, was gone; and there was not even a splendid mass of rare marbles to show for it.

"But what can you possibly have done with it?" enquired the King, in reply to the assurance of the Princess that the money was gone, and that she feared she was even a little in debt at the present moment.

"I do not know," said the Princess.

"You have not erected any buildings, have you?"

"No, Sire!"

"Have you entertained largely?"

"Oh! no!" said the Princess.

"Have you bought jewels, given presents? Is your expenditure lavish?"

The Princess was certain that she had been personally very moderate.

"Have you granted pensions? Have you encouraged the arts or sciences? Have you any expensive hobbies? Do you collect china?"

"Oh, no!" said the Princess, earnestly.

"Or—or—antiquities?" enquired the King, who was at his wit's end.

The Princess looked quite disturbed and said, "Oh, dear no!"

"I should not for a moment think of blaming you if you have been, let us say, too generous. Have you had favourite friends and attendants, and have you spent the money in enriching them or their families? Have you given largely to charities?"

The Princess sighed, as though she were somewhat tired of being questioned on such unimportant

matters, and after a moment's hesitation said that she really did not know what money she had bestowed on charities. She did not interfere with her people, who, some of them, were doubtless in the habit of giving to charitable institutions in her name.

"And so," said the King, "you have nothing whatever to show for that large sum of money I gave you?"

"If I had known, Sire, what your Majesty's wishes were, I should, of course, have made a point—"

"Sgunda! Sgunda!" said the King, "I shall not always be here to direct and advise! The question, however, now is—you must have spent the money, or the money, rather, has been spent in some way?"

"Yes, Sire, I presume so."

"And the plain fact is, that you have permitted yourself to be robbed right and left!"

"Have I? Oh! how dreadful."

"I must have your accounts submitted to me?" said the King, in a very displeased tone of voice.

"Accounts, Sire? I believe there are none."

The King touched a little bell that lay on the table, and immediately a young page, dressed in silver and blue, presented himself.

"Desire her Royal Highness's Keeper of the Purse to attend."

The page hesitated, and looked at the Princess.

"Oh," said she, hesitating also, "I—I—have no Keeper of the Purse, Sire."

"Then who keeps it?"

The Princess considered, looked at the little page, who was a very intelligent boy, and then at the King.



"Will his Majesty permit me to enquire? Boy Blue, who keeps my purse?"

"Your Royal Highness's expenditure is regulated this week by the Comptroller of the Coal-Cellar."

"And who regulated it last week?" enquired the King.

"The fifth secretary of her Royal Highness, Sire."

"You must have a large correspondence to require five secretaries, Princess?"

"I did not know I had five secretaries, Sire. Have I, Boy Blue?"

"Your Royal Highness has six."

The King made an impatient gesture—

"Go on. Who will regulate the expenditure next week?"

"I believe, Sire, that it is the turn of the High Master of the Kitchen to officiate, or it might be the turn of the sixth secretary."

"The turn!" exclaimed the King.

"Everybody takes it in turns, Sire."

"Oh, ho!" said the King, and then, after a moment's pause, he said "Oh, ho!" again. "And do you take your turn also, young gentleman?"

"No, Sire."

"Why not?"

"Because they do not give it to me."

"But you would like the privilege to be extended to you also, perhaps?"

"Yes, Sire."

"What would you do with it if you had it?"

"I would faithfully serve her Royal Highness, and the only errors I should make would be those a King could pardon."

"Oh, ho!" said the King again. "What is your name, sir?"

The page gave his name. "Good!" said the King, who never was mistaken in a face or forgot a name; "good; we will see into this!"

Accordingly, the whole of the time that the King remained with the Princess, was spent in "seeing into it," but with no results. The Princess Sgunda had asked for no accounts, and had not appointed any responsible person to keep them, or to attend in any way to the duties of regulating her expenditure. According to everybody, everybody else, it appeared, had helped himself. Each one laid the blame, the waste, the carelessness, the pilfering, in fact, to somebody else's charge. Never had there been seen so disorderly and dishonest a household. But with one unanimous voice, everybody laid the first and greatest blame on the Princess herself. She was so lazy, so careless, so indifferent, that it was only a wonder that she had not allowed the very diamonds to be pulled out of her little ears, and the rings off her taper fingers, as she sat! All she cared for was to snooze in bed till noon, and to idle about in her own private rooms for the rest of the day. She was never willing to receive visitors. Now that she was left to herself, she was too lazy even to read or to work, or to play or sing, and it was with the greatest difficulty that her ladies could induce her to take the mere walking exercise necessary to her health. She would occasionally drive out, but

even then she was careful to go where she would not see many people, in order to spare herself the fatigue of smiling and bowing her recognition of their greetings.

The poor old King was bitterly disappointed at the failure of his plan so far. The second Princess had done even worse than waste her time and money, on one useless hobby; she had squandered them on—nothing at all! She had moreover set a most terrible example of laziness and indifference, not only to the higher duties of a Princess's life, but the most ordinary duties of a young girl's existence. And she had by her most culpable disregard of money, and thoughtless neglect, placed temptation in the way of her weak fellow creatures.

There was absolutely nothing to be admired in this Princess's character, and, upon the whole, had the Prince been forced to choose between these first two Princesses, it is probable that he would have chosen the Princess Wuntha.

If, however, the second pretty Princess had shown herself to be grievously wanting in industry and order, the third Princess now showed herself to be grievously wanting in generosity, both ladies lacking entirely the wisdom of economy.

When the King, the Princesses, and the Prince arrived outside the gates of her town, they found no carriages waiting for them—and no Princess; but

in the distance there was a cloud of dust, coming slowly this time.

"What's that?" enquired the King of the Equerry by his side.

The Equerry raised himself in his stirrups. "I cannot distinguish anything at all for the dust, sire; possibly it may be her Royal Highness!"

"Coming so slowly as that, and she is late too!" said the King.

"It is we who are early!" said the Princess Sgunda, yawning.

The Prince, seeing an unmistakable look of astonishment on the Equerry's face, felt curious, and looked round the carriage behind his back:—

"It's a pic-nic party, on donkeys!" cried he.

"It is the Princess!" said the Equerry, in a low voice.

It was the Princess! She and her ladies were mounted on very handsome donkeys, and her gentlemen were on foot behind them.

The King had never seen anything like this before; the Equerry was purple; the Prince was scarlet; the Princesses were crimson; and everybody else was vermilion.

"Good gracious, Thirza!" gasped the King; "what is this foolish mummery?"

The Princess smiled, "What can be nicer, sire? I have no carriages worthy to take place among yours, and so I come to you humbly, and will accept a seat in your carriage."

"But we haven't enough places for everybody!" exclaimed the King.

"Oh! well, my ladies and gentlemen shall go back as they came."

"Not behind our carriages!" said the King, decidedly.

"Allow me to give up my place!" said the Prince, getting out.

"Thank you, Prince!" said the third Princess, getting in.

"And where is Prince Felix to go?"

"In the next carriage!" said the Prince.

"I won't have it!" said the King.

The Equerry suggested that the King and Prince should be in the first carriage, the Princesses in the second, and everybody else, all the ladies, in the other carriages."

"And the gentlemen follow after on the donkeys!" said the Princess Wuntha, sarcastically.

"Tut, tut, tut; the Prince and myself do not wish to look as if we were taking a ladies'-school out for a drive!" said the King, irritably.

The Equerry thought that the Princess Thirza might accompany the King and the Prince, the other two Princesses might be in the second carriage, and as for the ladies and gentlemen of the Princess Thirza's suit, they were doubtless accustomed to their peculiar form of progression, and might go back into town as they left it.

"That'll do! that'll do!" said the King; "though, mind you, we waste four places!"

"Three only!" said the Prince.

"True, three."

"It was so arranged, and the procession of carriages started off, leaving the procession of mules and pedestrians far behind it.

But the King was, what he seldom was, in a towering rage.

"You will perhaps be able to account for this piece of misplaced—misplaced folly, Princess."

"Oh! yes, Sire," said the Princess, "I can account for it. I am as distressed as is your Majesty at this contretemps, but it is not my fault. I have no carriages. I sent them all to be relined with nice grey linen. The man charged too much: I would not pay it. He kept the carriages. I persisted of course, and he persisted. Finally, seeing that I should probably have no carriage in which to meet your Majesty, I sent him a sum which I thought sufficiently exorbitant a price to pay, but still not nearly so large a sum as he had asked. He sent back the carriages this morning with all the lining torn out, and had the impudence to keep my own old lining. But, however, I will make him give up that at least."

"And were there no other carriages you could procure? Are there no carriages to be bought where you live?"

"To be bought, Sire!" almost screamed the Princess; "I did not, of course, for a moment imagine that your Majesty would expect me to lay out such a sum as it would require, to buy three or four carriages for merely the use of to-day."

"We will not enter into a discussion at present, Princess," said the King, coldly; "I cannot, however, refrain from telling you that I do not remember to have been so displeased for many years."

The Princess, however, was as impervious to the King's displeasure as she evidently had been to the towns-people's ridicule.

She had but one thought, and that thought was to save a farthing where she could; and if not a farthing, then a half-farthing. This excessive economy, which would have been so laudable in a young girl of small means, was anything but admirable in a person of her high rank and large fortune, and if it were a natural inclination she would have done well to have struggled against it. On the contrary, she encouraged it as much as she could.

She had accepted all the entertainments that had been offered to her, but she herself had given none in return that were worthy of the name, preferring to hold her receptions in the afternoon, in order to save the cost of wax-lights and heavy refreshments, which on these afternoon occasions consisted merely of small biscuits and cool drinks, such as lemonade, etc., etc. And even then, some grumblers averred

that the Princess's lemonade had not enough lemon in it; while others maintained that on the contrary there was not enough sugar in it, everybody agreeing, however, that it wanted something in it, which is precisely what a Princess's lemonade should not want, or for that matter anybody else's lemonade either.

This was, of course, comparatively speaking a trifle; but it was not a trifle that the Princess had been so averse to the notion of spending one single silver bit more than she could possibly help on her toilet, that she had strictly forbidden her ladies to appear before her in anything but stuff dresses and plain linen ruffles; and had expressed a marked wish that they should not wear any kind of ornaments whatever.

This severity of costume becoming, of course, the rule in high circles, speedily became the fashion elsewhere, and the trade of the town suffered so very seriously in consequence, that the Princess was by no means popular.

It is true that she did not refuse her aid to the different charities of the town, but her alms were indeed given grudgingly and of necessity, and seemed to carry no portion of her heart's goodwill with them—which halved their value.

The King was indeed too sore vexed at this painful parsimony of his third daughter to feel pleased, or even disposed to smile when the

Princess, with his permission, sent for the Keeper of the Purse and his neatly kept-books, and with her pink tipped forefinger pointed out to the King the various items of her expenditure, and the exceedingly large sum that yet remained to her of what her father had given her. Indeed, there were very nearly three quarters of it still unspent.

Nor did he feel inclined to laugh outright (as the Prince felt inclined to do), when the Princess turned suddenly to the Keeper of the Privy Purse with a look of dismay:—

"There's a half-farthing wrong somewhere," said she.

"Impossible, your Royal Highness!" cried the Keeper of the Purse, running his eye rapidly up and down the long columns of entries. But alas! so it was, and he looked up at the Princess with a face of equal consternation.

"Where can that have occurred?" enquired the Princess, in an undertone.

"Where, indeed!" exclaimed the Keeper of the Purse, clasping his throbbing temples in his fevered hands.

"This must be seen into at once," said the Princess, severely. "It is not for the value of the coin, of course, but I cannot allow the precedent to be quoted at some future time."

"I know!" cried the Keeper of the Purse. "Her Royal Highness will remember that she

dropped her purse this morning, while settling some accounts in the library, and that some money rattled from it. I must have miscalculated the amount of money that could possibly be in her Royal Highness's possession at the time, and was mistaken when I imagined I had recovered the exact sum. The half-farthing piece must be under the library table at this minute, I have no doubt."

"I have great doubts," said the Princess, anxiously. "One of the pages may since then have possessed himself of the coin."

The King lost patience.

"Here, Thirza," said he, shortly, "I make you a present of this gold piece."

"Thank you, Sire," said she, with sparkling eyes; "your Majesty's generosity, however, need not induce me to become neglectful. I shall with your permission see into this matter at once."

So saying, with a profound courtesy to the King, she left the room followed by the Keeper of the Purse.

It was exactly one minute and a half later than the hour at which the King dined, and as yet his Majesty was not served. Upon enquiring into the cause of this disgraceful want of punctuality, the excuse was made to the King that the half-farthing had not been found, and that the Princess Thirza had been so occupied with looking over her accounts that she had not had time to dress, and

that moreover she was now in a violent fit of hysterics, and vowed she never would taste food again until the mistake was corrected.

The King, though he was very hungry and rather angry, could not help laughing at the rueful face with which these excuses were made, and calling aside one of his gentlemen, spoke with him for a few moments, and then expressed aloud his intention of going to look himself for the missing half-farthing. There was, of course, no answer to be made. The only thing to do was to take a couple of candelabra from the table and light the King wherever he might see fit to go; because the corridors of the Princess were so ill-lighted that one was obliged to grope one's way as if one were in a cellar.

When the King reached the library, he found the Princess under the table, still looking for her coin.

"The pages must have taken it, Sire," said she, in troubled tones; "yet they are as indignant as possible at the mere accusation."

"Why, here it is!" cried the King, suddenly. "How badly you must have looked for it."

The Princess could not look astonished enough. There was even a certain expression of doubt on her face.

"Here it is," said the King, balancing it on his finger.

"How extraordinary!" said she.

Meanwhile the Prince, who had heard of her fruitless search, came gracefully at that moment through the doorway.

"Princess," said he, "I have been so exceedingly fortunate as to find your Royal Highness's half-farthing."

"Why, it is already found," cried she, still more amazed.

"Impossible!" said the Prince, a little taken aback. He was holding the little coin between his forefinger and thumb, and his colour changed slightly when he heard of the recovery of the missing half-farthing.

"Underneath the table; almost where it was dropped," said the King, maliciously.

The Prince recovered himself.

"Indeed," said he, "I thought this might be the coin, as I happened to see it by the side of the door-mat outside."

"There is no door-mat outside, Prince."

"I mean—I mean where a door-mat generally is."

At this moment the Keeper of the Purse demanded permission to enter the presence.

"Certainly; come in, come in," said the King. "Have you found this missing half-farthing, sir?"

"Yes, Sire," said the Keeper of the Purse, in joyous tones, "I found it—I found it in the portfolio I carried with me at the time the money was

dropped. I presume it must have slipped in unknown to me."

"Here are your farthings — half-farthings I mean," said the King to the Princess; "and now let us go to dinner."

The Keeper of the Purse kept his own counsel, and the King and the Prince kept theirs; but that evening the King gave a valuable ring from his finger to the blushing Keeper of the Purse.

"I am very pleased with the way in which you keep the Princess's accounts," said he, with a smile.

As for the Princess, she pocketed the farthing and a-half, and thought what she pleased; and the King, not finding her way of living at all to his taste, made but a very short visit to her, and commanded her to return to the palace at once, and procure herself a few new dresses.

"The Princess is very mean," said someone in the Prince's hearing.

"The Princess is a little cracked," thought the Prince to himself.

There were now but two more Princesses to visit, and of these two, one being the Princess Poppy, the hopes of the King and Prince were, of course, fixed upon the fourth Princess, whose name was Katremè.

Her reception of the King was one of the most elegant, if not the most magnificent that the King had ever seen, and he had seen a great many.

The Princess did not fail to meet her father at some distance from the town in a carriage of the most simple, and, at the same time, the most charming and tasteful description. As for herself, she was equally charming and tasteful in appearance, and was, as were all her ladies, dressed in the purest white, relieved by a few coloured ribbons; the only difference between herself and her ladies being that she had more bows of ribbon on her dress than they had.

As they approached the King's carriage, he thought that he had never seen anything more completely to his taste than the graceful, girlish group before him, and hurriedly asked the Prince's opinion.

The Prince replied, in as hurried an undertone, "Charming!"

Not less happy were the few well-chosen simple words of the Princess, as she was tenderly and hopefully embraced by her delighted father.

"My heart is too full for many words; but I am glad to see your Majesty," said she.

Just outside the city gates a splendid canopy of golden cloth had been erected, and for the space of about a hundred yards on all sides of it, the ground was carpeted with red cloth; and this space was roped in by a red and golden silk cord, the which was not supported by posts but by superbly attired lackeys. Beyond the cord was a double row of

soldiers clad in glittering armour, and beyond them the people, who, as may be imagined, were able to catch but very few and far-between glimpses of the royal party.

Around the canopy were twelve ladies in waiting for the Princess, who, in marked contrast to her, and the chosen three that had been with her in her carriage, were attired in the richest manner possible, and were covered with jewels. There were twelve gentlemen in full court costume, and no less than twenty-four pages, who were clothed in all the colours of the rainbow, embroidered in silver and gold. And as the King's carriage approached the canopy there was a burst of music from the throats of no less than a thousand children who were stationed around the gates and on the gates of the town.

The King was so pleased with this that he immediately consented to alight and to hear the rest of the chorus from beneath the golden canopy, where he was also pleased to receive the magnates of the city.

Only he was too quick sighted, and too much accustomed to receptions of all sorts not to have taken in everything at a glance, and far too kind and thoughtful not to say, in an undertone to the Princess,

"The people are too far off, they can see nothing."

"What eyes your Majesty has!" said the Princess, looking round her with wide open ones too; "I did not notice that the people were there."

"Remove the soldiers," said the King turning to a young officer who was standing at one of the poles of the canopy.

"But, Sire, it will spoil all the effect," said the Princess in agitated tones.

"Never mind! the people will see!" said the King smiling.

And so they did; and when they could see the King clearly there was a burst of greeting and thanks from a thousand or so of voices that amply repaid the King for his thoughtfulness.

But the Princess was in such a rage that she looked almost funny. The sweet gentle girlish look had quite left her face, and, it was easy to see that she was inordinately fond of having her own way. Nor did she recover her serenity until she happened by chance to catch the eye of the Prince, who was certainly contemplating her with close attention; and then, though she did not look at him, she smiled so suddenly and so beamingly at nothing in particular that the Prince smiled too; and murmured softly to himself, "Oh! oh!"

The streets through which the King passed on his way to his daughter's residence were very beautifully decorated, and the King himself was most enthusiastically received. The second carriage also con-

taining the three elder Princesses was much cheered, but the third, containing the Princess Katremè and her ladies, was received in absolute silence. This was always a great annoyance to the Princess of course, who asked herself frequently what she had done during her eighteen months' sojourn among these people to deserve their evident dislike.

Trade, for instance, must have been in a flourishing condition during her residence in the town, for though she was wise enough to know that a young girl really looks her best when simply dressed, she was innately fond of splendour and magnificence, and encouraged it in those around her. Her entertainments were costly and frequent, and she expected as many entertainments to be offered her in return. She had laid first stones of public buildings; she had opened public halls; she had visited hospitals. But, in so doing, she had left no pleasant memories behind her. She had looked simple, but she had not felt simple. There had been no frank smile, no kind encouraging word spoken, no real interest evinced. She had laid her soft hand on no little sufferer's head, there had been no quick real tear in her eyes, there had been no ready flush of sympathy on her smooth cheeks, there had been no word of gentle comfort on her red lips. When she was gone, she was gone! she left no regret behind her that she should be gone, and not one hearty wish that she might come again. She had been courteous

it is true, but it was with the courtesy of long habit and education, not with that of the heart.

"Katremè," whispered the King, as he seated himself at supper that evening, after a long and fatiguing reception, "will your ladies stand behind us all the time we are here?"

"All the time, Sire."

"All twelve?"

"All twelve, Sire."

"It is unnecessary, I think," said the King, "they must be as fatigued as we are."

"Perhaps!" said the Princess.

The King seemed uneasy, but said no more just then. By-and-by, however, he whispered, "Dismiss your ladies for the present, Katremè; you will oblige me."

When the King says "you will oblige me," there is nothing to do but to obey.

"Your Majesty is needlessly concerned," said the Princess. Nevertheless she dismissed her ladies, but with such ill-grace that the poor kind King was quite uncomfortable.

Nor could she recover her temper during the rest of the evening, and once she completely forgot herself, and showed herself in quite a new and not a becoming light to the Prince. She had asked for some water; it had been brought to her on a tray, and one of her ladies, a very young and timid girl, had taken the glass from the tray to present it to the Princess.

"You forget yourself," said she, coldly; "replace the glass."

The young girl blushed deeply, and put the glass back on the tray, too much agitated by the Princess's reproof to remember what she should do. She was helped in her difficulty by the servant who had brought the water, who was an old man, and well versed in the ways and etiquette of the Court. He put the tray into her hands with a look that plainly said "Hand it yourself."

The Princess, thus served, took her glass and drank; but the young girl was so overwhelmed with confusion at being thus publicly reprimanded, and trembled so violently, that when the Princess put the half emptied glass back on the tray, she stumbled and let the glass slide to the edge and fall, which, of course, sent the water trickling all over the Princess's dress. At this calamitous occurrence she was so horror-struck that she could only stand still with clasped hands, and instead of offering to assist the Princess, burst into tears.

"You are too awkward," said the Princess, severely; "your services will be dispensed with for the future; you may retire."

The young girl, thus dismissed publicly, could scarcely find courage to cross the room. She curtseyed — then hesitated — then curtseyed again — finally she turned very white and fell on her knees, and from her knees on the floor.

There was a commotion, of course, and she was speedily lifted out of the room; but when her sister would have left the room with her, too anxious to think whether it were pleasing or displeasing to the Princess that she should do so, the Princess turned upon her such a look of haughty surprise, that the poor creature was compelled, despite her natural anxiety for her sister, to remain where she was.

The Prince, however, who had been closer to the Princess Katremè during this little scene than she thought, retired softly, saying to himself—

"Oh—ho! that is it, is it? Well! the Princess is very pretty to look at: she is very accomplished; she is clever, and able to talk well on many subjects; she has admirable taste; she knows what are the ordinary routine duties of her position; but, I had rather become a Swampifrogglian at once, than be the husband of this ungentle lady."

No; the King's experiment had not been a success! The four young Princesses, who, subject to one rule and one code of behaviour, had been so uninterestingly uniform when in the Prince's society, had shown themselves, when left to themselves, to be dissimilar indeed.

There was no doubt that the Princess Wuntha was the most industrious, and possibly the most really clever of the sisters. But industry and cleverness, though much, are not everything, and it could not be denied that this Princess was

wanting in that quality which is the salt of all other qualities—common sense. The Princess Sgunda was undeniably amiable; but her amiability was merely one of manner. There can dwell no true amiability in the heart that is given up to idleness and indifference.

The Princess Thirza was not unfitted to become the wife of a poor man, but not of a great Prince. The unfulfilled duties that lie upon the surface of the earth waiting to be appropriated and fulfilled are legion; but it behoves the girl who wishes to take one or two upon herself to see clearly, and to choose wisely, and not to pass by the ones that lie at her very door, and wander off in search of some that should belong to others. As for the Princess Katremè, she could be a *loving* wife to no one, Prince or subject.

As for the King, though he dearly loved his daughters, and though perhaps to him their various faults and failings were not such complete surprises as they were to the Prince, still indeed he must have been startled at their wonderful development of late, and he could not hide from himself that as far as pleasing this most fastidious young gentleman went, the experiment had been a dreadful failure.

As for the Princess Poppæa, it was out of the question to think of her; her father loved her dearly, but it was out of the question—alas.

So accordingly, when this last visit was over, and the King and Prince found themselves quite alone, for the first time since their return to the King's palace, all his Majesty could say, feeling that something he must say, was—

"Well!"

"Sire?"

There was a long pause. The Prince meanwhile assumed a look of polite attention.

"I—I—only said, 'Well!'"

The Prince quitted his attitude of polite attention. There was a long pause.

"I am afraid, Prince!" said the King, "that you are not yet——"

"Sire!" began the Prince, warmly, "I—I——"

"Yes!" said the King, after waiting awhile; "the question lies in a nutshell."

"Your Majesty's remark, as profound as it is happy, exactly—exactly—expresses the——exactly expresses the situation."

"Prince! Prince!" said the old King, smiling, yet somewhat sadly, "you should be surnamed 'the cautious.'"

"Your Majesty means 'the prudent.'"

The King sighed. He was personally very deeply attached to the Prince, and was, moreover, very desirous, for reasons of state, that a marriage should take place between him and one of the Princesses.

"I have one daughter more!" said he; "shall we pay her a visit?"

The Prince hesitated. "Sire!" said he, "I have but one word: I have said that I would abide by your Majesty's choice from among the four elder Princesses; I am still willing to do so!"

"I will choose, Prince, after we have paid a visit to my youngest daughter."

The Prince bowed.

The King sighed, and looked fixedly out of the window; whereupon the Prince bowed again, and retired.

The town in which the Princess Poppæa had lived for the last eighteen months, was at the distance of one short day's journey from the King's palace, and when the Princess's residence was reached, the last rays of the bright spring sun were shining aslant through the distant trees.

Not less bright was the radiant smile of satisfaction that lay aslant his Majesty's lips as he entered the courtyard; for, totally unexpected as his visit had been, his reception by those people who had happened to be in the streets through which he passed, had been the most enthusiastic he had yet experienced.

It indeed seemed almost marvellous to see how the people gathered together as they did, and to think where they could come from! Wherever the King and Prince passed they found people, not

standing still to stare at them, but running as hard as they could run to meet them! Children scampering across the road here,—groups of workmen flinging down their tools there, to run and shout and wave their caps in the air.

People throwing up windows and stretching their bodies out of them, calling and gesticulating excitedly to one another. Young girls, forgetting to be shy and demure, springing forward with glad cries and clapping of hands. Young men forgetting to be dignified, and demeaning themselves like schoolboys. Schoolboys as hearty and loud-voiced as grown men. Old folks forgetting to be rheumatic, and skipping nimbly towards Royalty. People leaving their work—their children—their meals, or their play—to rush into the very middle of the road and roar a welcome, and then go back, laughing and chattering—

"The King looked nicely, didn't he? Like the rest of us—getting on, you know! But he looked nicely, didn't he?"

The King knew well the difference between welcome and welcome, and that is why his face was so smiling!

Of course, directly the carriage was seen there was a rush, and eager voices calling out—"The King! the King!" in various tones of surprise. But he threw himself from his little open carriage with such an unmistakable sign to enjoin silence,

that everybody was arrested with one foot in the air, as it were.

The King desired to be immediately taken to the Princess, and requested the Prince to follow him. (He was perfectly sure of Poppy's welcome, at least!)

The Princess was sitting on the other side of the building on a terrace, at work with her ladies, and had not heard of the King's arrival in consequence. Nor did she or her ladies hear the sound of footsteps now, owing to the chirping of the birds in the garden and their own little tongues, that were as busy as the spinning wheels before them, and the light laughter that was such a pleasant accompaniment to it all.

The King paused, well pleased with the pretty picture——

"HIS MAJESTY THE KING!"

This announcement fell like a shell among all these young girls. Everyone sprang to her feet and faced the doorway. As for the Princess herself she was perfectly white with astonishment and emotion, as she came rapidly forward.

It was, however, only necessary for her to take one glance at the King's face to be reassured, and the next moment she had thrown her arms round his neck, and was half crying, half laughing, with pleasure.

"Princess," whispered the delighted King, as he

warmly returned her greeting, "recollect that we are not alone."

She started slightly, of course, and the colour came into her cheeks. As far as that went she was still the Princess Poppy; but it was the Princess Poppæa, surely, who turned gracefully to the Prince, and said, simply and cordially—

"I am glad that your Royal Highness is not standing on the edge of a fountain!"

"And I, Princess, am grieved that I have not now an enormous smut on my nose!" said the Prince, quickly.

The King was charmed. "Poppæa," said he, "you are positively growing pretty!"

And so she was. Not that her chin, mouth, eyes or nose were in the least altered, or that her hair was changed in colour; but as she stood before them, her voice unsteady with emotion, a happy smile on her lips, and a tear sparkling in each eye—with an air, moreover, of quiet self-possession, which became her admirably, and harmonized most happily with that innate simplicity of manner which had been hers always,—both King and Prince felt how pleasant she was to look at, and how exceedingly pleasant to listen to.

So pleasant, indeed, that when the Prince presently retired to his own rooms, he suddenly exclaimed—"Dear me! I never noticed whether her hands were still red or not!"

The evening, no preparations having been made for festivities, passed very quietly. But the King found ample and pleasurable employment in observing how charmingly the Princess Poppy did the honours of her house. And if it was easy to see that she was not by any means entirely cured of her painful shyness and nervousness, it was as easy to see how constant were her endeavours to overcome them. She had, indeed, in eighteen months, done much for herself. And this is how she had done it:

She had felt that the foolish shyness and awkwardness to which she had given way in her father's palace, might have been excusable there, where there were four elder sisters to take precedence of her, and to divert attention from her—where she might, in fact, be supposed to be somewhat unnoticed in the background,—but was not permissible in the prominent position in which the King had seen fit to place her.

The Princess knew that for eighteen months all eyes would be turned upon her, and although dismayed indeed at the terrible ordeal she must undergo, knew also that the time for doing honour to the King, her father, and to the memory of the Queen, her mother, had arrived, and that it now behoved her to put self aside and learn how best to honour them.

It was not certainly by making herself ridiculous,

and everybody around her uncomfortable with her palpable nervousness, that she would do it!

Nor was it by tripping over her train, and stumbling over her footstool, or stammering confusedly when she had something to say, that she would do credit to her parents.

The Princess, having thus seriously thought the matter over, went to work systematically and resolutely.

Her rooms had generally been remarkable for the small amount of furniture they contained, so terrible was her habit of knocking things over with her elbows, or sweeping them away with her skirts or sleeves, so apt was she to run the backs of chairs into pier glasses, and to drag tablecovers off tables.

She now had her private rooms luxuriously furnished with every small chair, every large chair, every description of unsteady three-legged table, every movable screen and loosely hung bookshelf, and slender-footed China vase, every low stool and tottering flower stand she could think of; while she herself wore the longest trains, the deepest fringes, and the most fragile laces that she could procure, and thus steadily and earnestly plunged into the very midst of her difficult task.

The household was aghast, of course, but equally, of course, having nothing to say, did not say it, but thought the more.

It was misery at first; and the brave little Princess shed more tears in private than anybody knew of, or dreamt of.

She persevered, however, so courageously, that at the end of two weeks she took a further step, and that was to load her furniture with a quantity of thin china and glass ornaments and breakable nick-nacks. There was not a space large enough to lay a book or a fan on tables or shelves or cabinets until one had moved half a dozen, fragile articles out of the way.

The result of this experiment was a great many more tears and continual smashes; but still she dried her eyes, drove out with one of her ladies, and visited fresh potteries and porcelain collections, from which she selected a fresh supply of the most easily broken articles, and the unsteadiest in shape, that she could find. In about another month she was amply rewarded for her perseverance; for on trying a further experiment upon herself, she was delighted to find that it succeeded most admirably.

She waltzed round her cumbered room in and out among the multifarious pieces of furniture with one of her longest trains trailing behind her, high-heeled shoes, and tightly-folded arms, and she did not displace so much as the corner of a mat, or the end of a bell-rope. When the dance was finished, she turned round with such a delighted face to the lady who was in her special confidence, and who

had played the guitar while she danced, that the guitar was thrown on one side, and the Princess gave a jump forward.

"Victory—victory!" cried she, clasping her sympathising friend in her arms; and the friend laughed and cried with pleasure.

"You dear sweet Princess! how pleased the King will be! Now we shall have you walking up and down on reception nights as gracefully as a young swan; and when we go up and down the stairs, we shall be the admired of all beholders! And when the Princess is pleased to dance, the most elegant dancers will sink into insignificance and will leave off dancing to crowd round her, and observe and learn something."

The Princess laughed, and patted her friend's cheek, and called her "Chatterer!" But nevertheless she was glad at heart, for she knew that she could no longer be called awkward. Her feet had become sensitive, and her movements were more fully under control.

As far as her manner and conversation went, she was more immediately successful. She had not so much trouble with herself when once she had convinced herself of this truth—that in order to please, one must look pleased, and in order to look pleased, one must feel pleasant.

Now to feel always pleasant is a very difficult thing to accomplish; and the Princess knew that

there is but one way of accomplishing it, which is to occupy one's time and thoughts rather with the cares, pleasures, and wishes of others, than one's own; and if she did not succeed entirely in her object in eighteen months, or, indeed, in eighteen years either, still she did succeed in often feeling pleasant under very trying circumstances, and consequently in looking it. For the purer the aim, the heartier the resolve, and the easier the effort!

Having thus overcome by sheer force of will and hearty perseverance many of her little failings, the Princess could not help feeling a little natural anxiety that the King, whom she dearly loved, and to whom she had not unfrequently given some trouble, should be a speedy witness of her success, and should see that she was no longer the silly Princess Poppy, but the Princess Poppæa, a lady of some influence in the town in which she lived, and one of the most popular Princesses of her time, for certain it was that she could not show the tip of her little nose anywhere without hearty shouts of welcome.

It was, therefore, with a little very natural feeling of pleasure at the pleasure she was expecting to give the King, that she took her seat next morning in the little low open carriage, in which she and the King, and their guest, the Prince, were to drive through the town, the King having desired that he should be attended only by two outriders.

He had, however, with the artful design of learning whether the Princess was considered to be popular or not, enquired whether the Princess was in the habit of driving out without an escort.

And the answer had been made in as amused a tone of voice as a courtier could permit himself to use: "It is her Royal Highness's custom. The Princess has no need of soldiers, for every man in the town is on guard as she passes."

"Very pretty!" said the King, smiling.

Accordingly, as beforesaid, the Princess had taken her seat and the Prince had taken his at a sign from the King; but the King himself had waited one moment to address a few words to an old servant whom he recognised.

Just as he was about to enter the carriage, a gun belonging to a sentinel, not twenty yards distant, exploded in his hands, and the rebound knocked him over, but did not, by a happy chance, injure him seriously. It frightened the horses of the King's carriage, however, so exceedingly that they gave one terrific bound into the middle of the courtyard, and dashed on at fullest speed.

"Shut the gates!" shouted somebody.

"Don't shut the gates!" cried another, both tearing after the carriage. There was no time to do anything. Everybody ran, but the horses flew. The postillion sat firm and tugged with all his might. The outriders tore after them *ventre à terre.*

They flashed past the gates, luckily in the very middle, and down the road.

"Don't move," said the Prince, quietly; "they will stop us presently, Princess."

But she could only grow white to her lips, and nod her head.

"How brave you are!" said the Prince, smiling; "but keep perfectly still."

She tried to smile too, but could not speak, for she was choking.

Down the road they dashed, swaying to and fro. Twenty or thirty yards further on, they ran with such violence against one of the trees that bordered the roadway that the carriage was overturned, and the Princess, the Prince and the postillion flung to the ground. The two latter were unhurt, and sprang the next second to their feet, and, dazed and stunned, staggered towards the poor little Princess, who lay as she had fallen on her side, white and unconscious.

* * * * * *

It was late at night, and the Princess had not yet spoken.

The King's despair may easily be imagined. He wept so bitterly that he could not stay in the room where she lay—so very pale now, and so pitifully silent; but he would not leave the corridor outside her door, but paced up and down its length unceasingly, resting on the Prince's arm, and

sending every five minutes for one of the Princesses or the doctors, or one of the ladies, in order to put the same questions over and over again.

"How is she? Will she recover? Has she moved yet?"

But alas! the answer was always, "No, not yet. Much the same. We cannot tell just yet."

The Princess Wuntha added, sobbing bitterly, "the Swampi—Swampifrogglians used—used boiled rushes in these cases of prolonged Flac—Flacciput —I mean syncope!"

The Princess Sgunda only cried, but at least she cried with some energy.

The Princess Thirza vowed she would give—would give—something! to hear her darling Poppy's voice again; and even the Princess Katremè said, "I am, indeed, distressed that my dear sister should have been so unfortunate. It seems, indeed, as though her own sad little defect of awkwardness had extended to her very horses and sentinels; and, of course, she could but fall awkwardly." And she let fall one tear so skilfully, that it trickled slowly down her nose, and made a very good show by itself.

As for the ladies of the Princess, they could hardly see out of their eyes with weeping.

And the doctors had but one answer: "The state of the Princess was most critical. There was nothing to show that concussion of the brain had taken place. Outwardly the Princess was unhurt,

and though she was seemingly unconscious, she appeared to be sensitive—painfully sensitive to sound."

What touched the King's sad heart very deeply, was to see the crowd that had gathered together under the windows.

The room in which the Princess was lying, looked not over the courtyard, but on to a narrow stone terrace and a railing of gilt iron bars, which separated the building from that part of the gardens which was open to the public.

Ill news travels fast, and the gardens were crowded, although the hour was so late.

It was a dark, starless night, and one could only see distinctly the few who stood within the light of the lamps; but, even beyond the lamps, one could distinguish a dark mass, moving slowly to and fro, like a great black wave. And the unceasing hum from the many hundreds of voices, all speaking in a lower voice than usual, told of the deep interest that the people felt in the accident that had happened to the poor little Princess.

The King and the Prince had gone into the room next to that of the Princess, and were watching the crowd from behind a curtain.

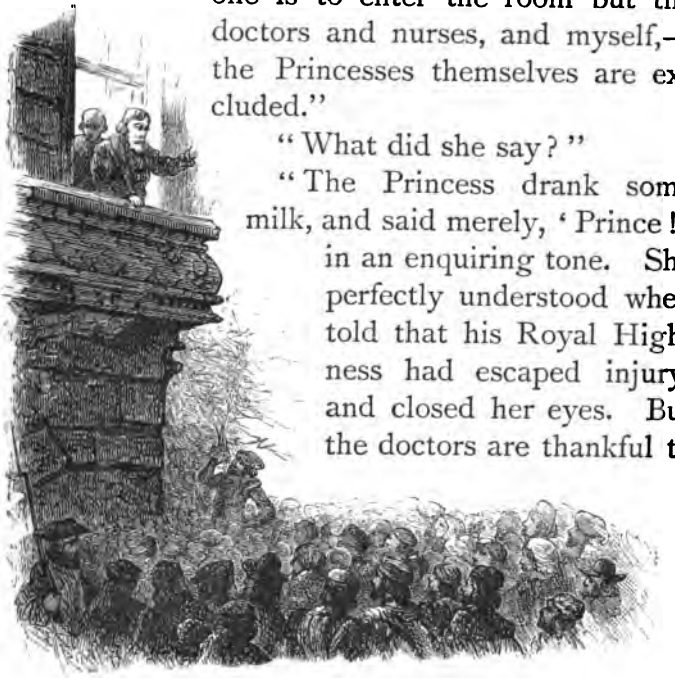
"They know her worth," said the King, sadly, "and they are sorry for me."

At that moment the door was thrown open without ceremony, and a lady came forward with clasped hands.

"She has spoken!" said she.

The King rushed to the door, but was prevented from leaving the room.

"Your Majesty is entreated to keep calm. No one is to enter the room but the doctors and nurses, and myself,—the Princesses themselves are excluded."



"What did she say?"

"The Princess drank some milk, and said merely, 'Prince!' in an enquiring tone. She perfectly understood when told that his Royal Highness had escaped injury, and closed her eyes. But the doctors are thankful to see that her memory is apparently unimpaired. They have desired me to give orders that the crowd shall be dispersed from beneath these windows,—but I do not know how that is to be done,—the noise disturbs the Princess."

The King ran to the window, and throwing it

wide open, stepped out on to the balcony without one second's hesitation.

The bright light from the room threw his figure into bold relief, and he was immediately recognized. There was a stir and a rush forwards, and the beginning of a cry, but the King held up his hand.

A dead silence followed.

"Absolute quiet is necessary to the Princess!" said he, not loudly but very distinctly. "The King entreats you to be quiet!"

The King then covered his face with his hands, and left the balcony, sobbing.

A final murmur of sympathy ran through the crowd like a thrill, but ten minutes afterwards one might have heard a leaf fall to the earth!

Towards morning everyone's heart was lightened of a great load. The Princess had quite recovered her consciousness,—had asked to see the King, and had sat up in her bed, supported by his Majesty, and had taken a cup of chocolate.

The doctors, though overjoyed, were not a little startled at this speedy rally, and concluded that the Princess's long-continued state of unconsciousness had been caused by the sudden shock to her nerves. However it may have been, everybody was too delighted to care for causes, when effects had proved to be comparatively unimportant, and the dear little Princess so fast becoming her bright self again. The King embraced the

doctors with effusion, and the Princesses and their ladies fell into each other's arms, and cried over each other's shoulders, in threes and fours. Even the Prince walked to a distant window, and contemplating the blinds with a severe face, blew his nose as surreptitiously, once or twice, as he could.

This was at dawn only; and when later on, the curtains were drawn, and the agitated King would fain have breathed the fresh morning air, and went to the window for that purpose, there was the same patient waiting crowd again.

Had they gone home; or had they stood there patient and silent as statues, and as motionless almost, all night? Whether they had gone and returned, or stayed, mattered very little; there they were now; and they must indeed have had their hearts in their feet, and in their voices; for going, coming, or staying, not so much as by a single footfall, or an unguarded exclamation, had they willingly disturbed the rest of the little Princess they loved so truly.

This sincere respectful love spoke well indeed for her who could inspire it, and the King was moved to tears again—only, this time, happy ones,—and so thankful and glad was he that he himself would tell them what they wished so much to know, and stepped again on the balcony.

There were a thousand upturned faces in a moment, and all bare heads, but not a sound.

"She is better—well," said the King, in a choking voice.

It was only a murmur, but a murmur from a thousand throats.

It reached the Princess's ears as she lay back weary and content and grateful, and she smiled at her sisters, and then shut her eyes and prayed for worthiness.

It reached the other Princesses' ears, and they blushed, half annoyed, and half ashamed. It reached the furthermost corners of the whole building, and everybody came running to the garden side to see and wonder, and listen.

It reached further still—it reached as far as the Prince's heart.

"Prince," said the King, later in that day, "let us be frank, and speak frankly."

The Prince bowed.

"She will never be surnamed 'Poppæa the Great,' or 'Poppæa the Beautiful,' but she will be known far and wide as 'Poppæa the Well-beloved.'"

The Prince bowed again. He seemed as one somewhat lost in reflection; presently he looked up smiling, and his smile was very pleasant.

"Sire," said he, "one thing troubles me. The Princess Poppy may not wish to accept me as a husband."

The King started, sat down quickly on the nearest chair, stared at the Prince for a moment,

then quickly clasped him to his heart with a huge sigh of relief.

"I must confess, Prince, that you have taken some while to decide."

"Confess, too, Sire, that this Princess was worth waiting for."

The Princess Poppæa, when questioned on the subject, had not one single objection to make. Why should she? She replied frankly that the King was far too dear to her for her to dream of thwarting his wishes; if even the Prince had not happened to be one of the—in fact *the* most charming person of her acquaintance.

And everybody was pleased: The two Kings and their kingdomsful of subjects; and the two persons most concerned—the Prince and the Princess.

The only people who were *not* pleased, were the other Princesses.

"I cannot but wonder that the Prince's choice should have fallen on so ignorant and unsympathising a child: she has neither high ambitions or lofty views that might benefit her country," said the Princess Wuntha. "But there! as the greatest of authors has said, 'Floop doddleby smuk!'"

The Princess Sgunda yawned once or twice and said, "What a nuisance; there will be no end to the dressing and receiving and fatigue."

"But I shall make the King give me all my dresses!" exclaimed the Princess Thirza, red in

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the face with dread of the expense that the wedding would be to her. "How shocking it is that the Prince must marry a girl with no more notion of economy than a canary bird!"

"What I want to know," said the Princess Katremè, speaking loud enough for the Prince to hear, "is this. What has Poppy done that this fuss should be made over her? Nothing more than we have, any of us, done—has she?"

"She has certainly resuscitated no dead language, and she has, I believe, erected no splendid temples to learning," murmured the Princess Wuntha.

"She has not enjoyed her own little pleasures, and she has not let other people enjoy theirs; she has not been indulgent," yawned the Princess Sgunda.

"She has not put by a fortune for a rainy day," said the Princess Thirza, with some contempt in her tone.

"You are very right," said the Princess Katremè. "What I should like to know is this—*What has she done?* Will any one inform me?"

There was a pause of a few moments, then the Prince came forward—

"Princess," said he, gently, "I will take that honour on myself. This is what the Princess Poppæa has done. She has known how to command respect and to win affection."

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